FILM QUARTERLY

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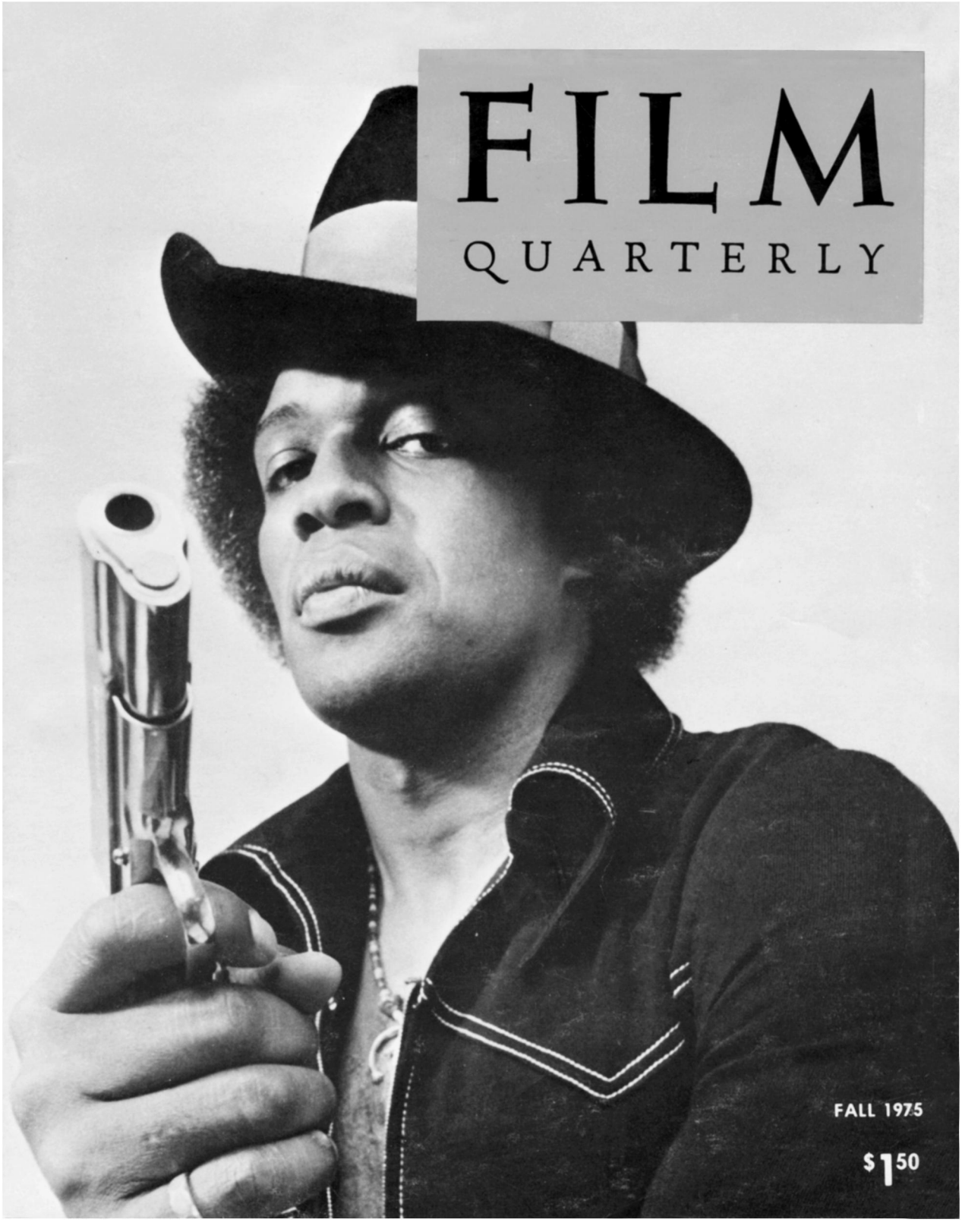

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BRANDON WANDER

Black Dreams

THE FANTASY AND RITUAL OF BLACK FILMS

The ritual of black films begins in a downtown theater, a soiled, aging movie warehouse built for a different class and a different race. Inside the huge cavern, the empty balcony overhangs and lends a dark, cramped feeling. The gold-leaf baroque friezes are peeling, electrical wires short-out, and trash and gummy substances stick to the soles of shoes. Tonight there is a black film, but last week it could have been skin flicks, and before that, a mix of the two in an all-night, sex-action-violence triple bill.

A new group of moviegoers gather. Saturday night is every night. The dress is eleganza. The lights go out. The screen holds black faces, speaking their own tongue, doing what they and many other blacks want to do. Cat-calls and right-ons and squeals of women's delight combine to make an immediate reality. The streets are only 100 feet behind you. Police cars cruise, prostitutes walk into bars, port bottles share space with hunched men in dim doorways.

The history of black filmgoing is short. Before 1971, blacks did not want to see Stepin Fetchit, Amos 'n' Andy or *Guess Who's Coming To Dinner?* icons. White dream-puff musicals, westerns, and thrillers made even less sense. The reaction against the prevailing dirty, sexy, emotional, violent, child-like black stereotypes led to conservative counter moves. The black community responded in a manner ranging from the authoritarian, politically passive and sternly religious Nation of Islam to plain, hard-working, middle-class Negroes. The reaction against this reaction came but a few long years ago with the Watts rebellions and the Black Panthers. The film artists chronicling these recent experiences have distilled their own self-made stereotypes, most notably the All-Powerful Black Stud. If their reaction has come full circle to approximate initial white stereotypes, it remains to be seen whether they are used ironically or unwittingly.

Nonetheless, as the industry did for poor whites during the depression, black films offer escape from gloom, roaches, and social confusion of center-city colonies. This image warehouse offers a means of reviewing life, exaggerated or absurd as it may be, and directs the audience towards the coolest route out.

For generations films and the electric media have shaped collective white perceptions. Yet film is a new influence in shaping or diffusing the black community's perception of itself. As Ralph Ellison and Otis Redding have distilled its essence in word and song, the first steps toward a parallel achievement in film have been made.

The new black cinema runs the gamut from black-produced and directed works, to white-controlled black works, to white-controlled white works using blacks for blacks. In an industry controlled from production to exhibition by vested white interests, the environment is not good for radical black filmic forays. The blues require no capital investment, but the mother's milk of films, dollars, still flow from traditional white sources. There are exceptions.

If any black films are collectively heading in a unified direction, which I think they must, or diverging in conflict, we must first identify the elements in common or not in common. The cinema is a tool. A culture can use it for enlightenment rituals or entertainment rituals or both. It can be used to make bucks. Black cinema

can help the black community towards self-identity. Or, it can be used by whites and unwittingly by blacks as a subtle machine for continued pacification, to tap the new market, and instill false dreams.

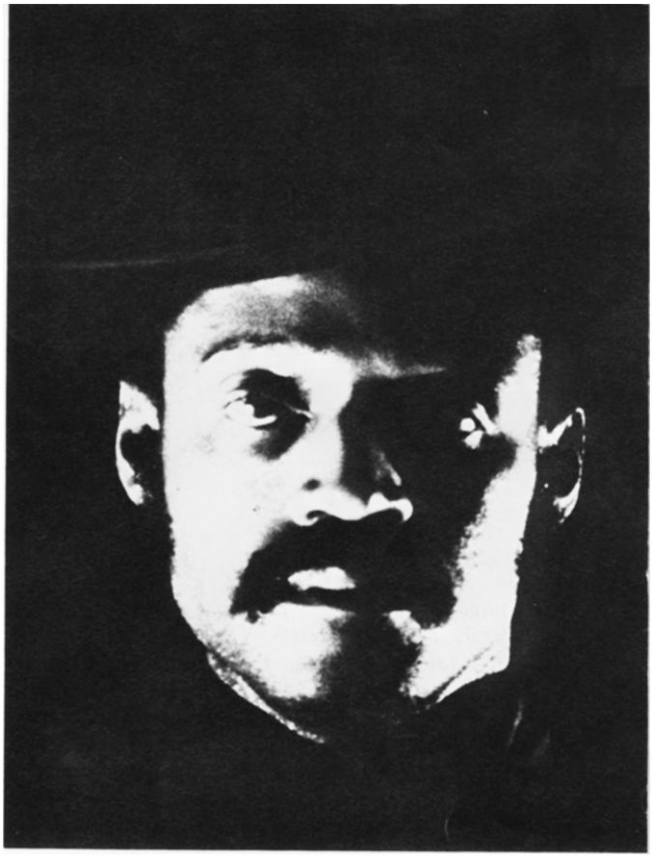
2. "Dreams are not the symbols of reality, but reality." —Luis Bunuel

Most black and white critics spend their time attacking shortcomings of black cinema, and not paying enough attention to what's going on beneath the diamond-gloss surface. Since *Shaft* (1971), critics have devoted their energy to fashioning barbs about machodom, reverse racism, intellectual malnutrition, and violence-as-art masquerading—all of which are true to a certain degree. But simplistic answers explaining these films' popularity are insufficient. One critic thought *Superfly* was popular in New York because the black community recognized the Flymobile as belonging to a local gentleman of leisure (pimp).

Black films, despite their shoddiness, are creating a black mythology. Each film is a ritual, a morality play, recognized and appreciated by its audience.

A mythology. Most critics would say that's what's the matter with these films: beginning on the streets they quickly move into a dream world. These critics miss the importance of value-guiding fantasies. Every culture needs myths to aid in its survival. The myths give unscientific explanations, but explanations nonetheless, of a confusing world. The repetitive, pulp rituals reenact such myths in a simple form recognizable by everyone. Stylized dress and language are important signifier in the ritual. They transform mundane, everyday transactions into representative mini-reenactments of the basic myths. Walking down the street dressed to kill, sliding into a bar to pick up some white stuff, all alludes upward to the Black Stud myth.

Each film, *Superfly, Hit Man, Black Caesar, Sweet Sweetback,* and *The Education of Sonny Carson,* can be as a staged semi-religious ceremony, where the players wear different robes and an emblematic sign or mask: "Exploited Hero," "White Devil Cop," "Godfather Oracle," "Ghetto Chorus." The ebony mythology of these films should explain black society's relation to white society, at least in filmic terms.



Melvin Van Peebles as Sweetback

Before we examine black filmic mythology, it's important to outline the environment in which it grew, i.e., to outline the dominant white mythology and its rituals. This is crucial for us to see whether black mythology is reactionary, derivative, or creative.

White folktale mythology was born with the founding fathers, the Bill of Rights, and "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." It established a cult of individualism, ordained by God, protected by the government, and advanced in the economic world by Social Darwinism. Each person's net worth is measured independently. By

contrasting each person against each other, one is either worth more or less, and conversely, the others around him are worth more or less. Since it's difficult to get a reading on one man's spiritual wealth against another, the only true reading can be made by social standing. Although the Puritans felt your life was pretty much pre-ordained before birth, they believed that if you did well it was a sound indication of how you were pre-ordained. This "truth" lingers on.

To secure a relative position of worth on this simple yardstick, it requires some people be superior and others inferior. Of course, liberal philosophy demands that government assure members of the in-club an equal start at birth, so the process of natural selection would not be unjustly warped. Of course, blacks were only given a three-fifths membership. In their case, nature was given a helping hand.

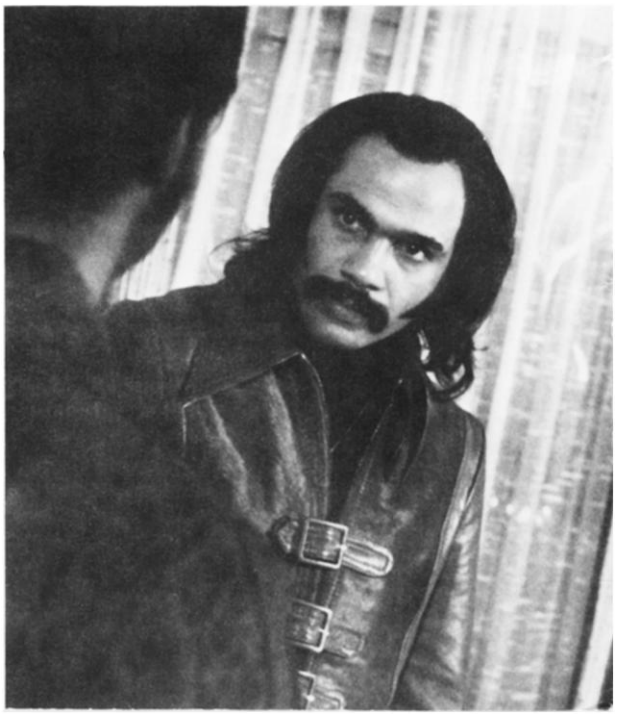
Racism was the method used to build WASPS up, tear the others down, because that way you could avoid dealing with the logical dysfunction that these "others" were not given an equal chance at birth, letting nature and natural selection decide each individual case. Instead their fate had already been *collectively* determined—another dysfunction in the libertarian philosophy.

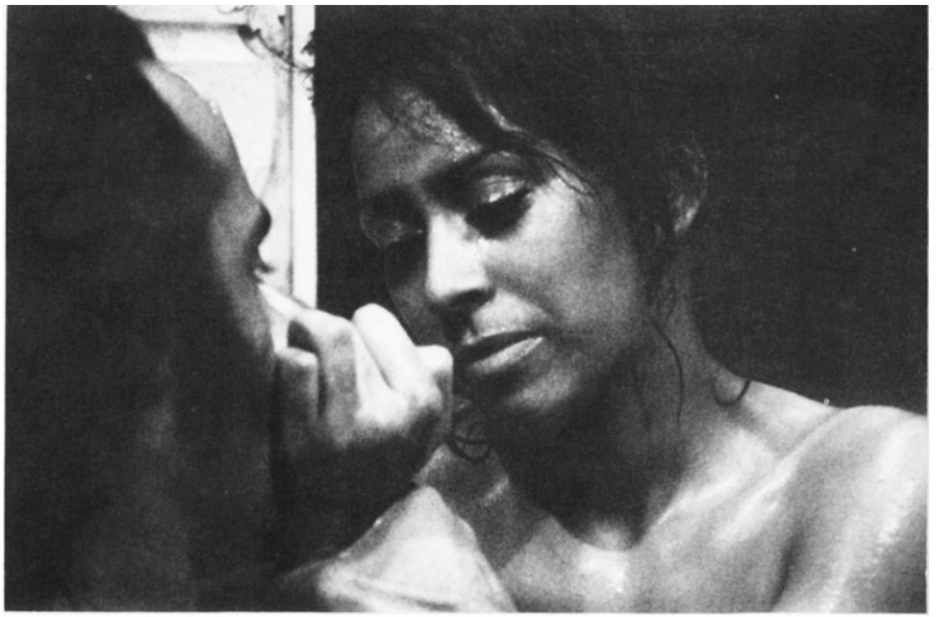
As white American culture progressed, its mythology was absorbed into a variety of social establishments in complicated and subtle ways. Examining white cinema, the western and detective models have reinforced white filmic generations' sense of cultural superiority by doling out the mystery and sense of certainty necessary to assure a unified, continuous overview of past, present, and future. Demigods such as Randolph Scott or Philip Marlowe have entered the irrational frontier or urban jungle and restored white balance and meaning. You know beforehand John Wayne will kill the gooks and be victorious. Meanwhile, blacks, who began as three-fifths of a man, continued as endearing fractions through early cinema, radio, and television. Thirty mass-media years of Amos 'n' Andy's Kingfish, Calhoun, and Sapphire may have etched those black bozo stereotypes deeper than any others. By disseminating these myths in potent visual form, these filmic structures have underwritten white culture's vitality and survival.

Before us is black cinema, five years old, with its own set of myths. After identifying the myths, we can examine their orientation. For the final question to be asked of black cinema, one of absolute artistic and thematic integrity, is whether its mythology *ultimately* redefines the black image by utilizing a new inventory of values, styles and language.

3. Superfly

Superfly is a cool, coked dude searching for definite material and somewhat uncertain spiritual freedom. He is a drug dealer playing "the only game the white man has left us." Ron O'Neal, as Superfly, plays well. His pad, his Flymobile, his women give him the trappings of the bourgeois elite. Then comes an oft-repeated ritual catch. Superfly isn't "free." He wants to buy time to be "free." The only way to buy time is to set up a 30-kilo deal with Scatter, a flop-hat cook played by Roscoe Lee Browne, and get out of the business. But he has to deal with his main man, the supplier who is also the police commissioner. Along the money route, Superfly rejects his partner's accept-





SUPERFLY: Left, below, Ron O'Neal deals with his partner Carl Lee. Right, O'Neal dallies with Sheila Frazier.

ance of the passive American Dream, "Eight-track stereo and color TV in every room—that's it, ain't it, nigger?" Superfly trains for the mythic jungle match. Any contradictions between Superfly's rejection of bourgeois materialism and his individual pursuit of "life, liberty and (material) happiness" are glossed over as Curtis Mayfield's requisite jive opera wa-wa's us toward the final scene. By taking out a $100,000 contract with white killers on the main man's all-American family (a faggot son and fat-legged daughter are the only white teens mentioned in the movie), Superfly defeats Superpig and the gleaming Flymobile rides into the street.

Gordon Parks, Jr. directed this epic of coke charisma.* The bang-bang editing, bump-bump music, and cluttered colorful images give the film a funky, earthy, powerful sense. The speed with which actors, camera, and editing move appear designed to secure the audience's constant attention through a merry-go-round technique. As Melvin Van Peebles has warned, "Whatever you do, don't bore Brer. Because when Brer is bored, he's *bored.*"

*The director of this black conceived and financed macho flick is not to be confused with Gordon Parks, Sr., the *ex-Life* photographer and director of *Shaft* and *Shaft's Big Score.* The two do tend to collaborate behind the credits, with Pop's *The Learning Tree* one example.

The plot and technique make *Superfly* a complete ritual. Through his individual story, Superfly glorifies the strength of past black survival and reinforces a belief in a cyclic future—that more of the same is to come. Like the other four films, *Superfly* creates the mythic image of the Black Warrior. While inwardly developing his non-European characteristics, he is locked in perpetual battle with white society. The language, music, and rich, busy images give him an informal identity. But a definite epistemology, a manner of ordering life, is unclear or reactionary.

The most obvious result of hero mythology is a Grand Ritual, melodramatic and larger than life. The potent images direct the audience toward mimicry of the black warrior as a plausible means away from the streets one hundred feet behind your seat. The Black Warrior's life appears exciting, certain, and ultimately rewarding. With a veneer of street-corner realism, enlivened by coke and Cadillacs, the ritual's illusions settle into an exaggerated conception of everyday life. Outside the theater, dreams become reality.

What about this load of Superman stuff? It's evident the Black Warrior is cloaked in the fashionable armor of his people, speaks his own dialect, and listens to the blues, not the Bowies. This attractive shell draws the audience towards a core of bad-assed individualism. Are these black John Waynes? (Peebles says of his super-hero

Sweetback, he's "a brown Clint Eastwood.")

The warrior mythology does not aid in determining a communal identity beyond the sum of individual entities. In this regard, it is reactionary, approximating white myths. But the warrior myth does lead to progress in black cinema's search for identity. It leads to self-respect through individual victory over white exploiters, victories which have been deprived blacks in the filmic arena, and the asphalt arena.

A community, though, cannot advance through random successes. It needs a general raising of consciousness aimed at this warrior existence, the state of black womanhood, and the exploitation of blacks through drugs by other blacks.

4. Hit Man

In terms of language and armor, *Hit Man* is important to a filmic black identity. It can also be considered one of the worst blaxploitation flicks made by whites for the center-city market. George Armitage, a shoddy white screenwriter and uneven director, sinks into the L.A. low life as Tyrone Tacker, played by big Bernie Casey, 6'4" ex-split end for the Rams, tries to avenge his brother's mysterious death.

As a logical or thematic whole, *Hit Man* is disjointed and not worth understanding. Yet the film illustrates how the street savvy of black actors can turn a film around from the inside out, and provide the accouterments for a celluloid ritual in which the viewers participate. The manner Tyrone dresses and talks are key signals for the audience's identification. He wears an open red shirt to his brother's funeral and speaks in a rhythmical drawl difficult for whites to understand. In a whorehouse stocked with black beauties, Tyrone, in his wide-brimmed hat, is the only black man in a sea of decadent white businessmen. Here he finds his brother's "real superstar baby . . . his main thing" (with heavy emphasis on 'ng' 'ma' sounds).

The dress can be bought, but the non-literal meaning to the words and syntax never fully grasped. In a trickly, isolated scene, Tyrone and a greasy used-car salesman gulp Jack Daniels while riding a Cadillac through a car wash. The conversation crumbles into seemingly unintelligible grunts, but by intonation they (and the black audience) understand each other perfectly.

As in most white-produced black films, there is no attempt here at raising the viewers' consciousness. There are no questions asked about prostitutes and pimps and what is true black womanhood. Instead, a clever game is played. An unsophisticated audience is deceived through dress and language and music into assuming this is a complete *black* ritual, (representative of the black identity) while it's actually a derivative form of John Wayne individualism.

5. Black Caesar

This film's importance lies in its reception. Larry Cohen, its white director, writer, and producer, smells the dollars in dress ritual. The result, though not due to lucid judgment, is devastating.

Fred Williamson, ex-Green Bay linebacker, is Black Caesar. "The Hammer" draws "right-on's" from the theatre audience. (Williamson still bears the nickname he earned in football.) He's big, carries a bigger gun, and has set up white murders since he was a Harlem shoeshine boy. The kleenex plot centers on Black Caesar's rise to power in Harlem. At each turn, James Brown screams in muted jerks the tone-setting tune, "Down and Out in New York City."

Wresting control from the Mafia and a police commissioner who broke his leg as a kid over

◀ HIT MAN

BLACK CAESAR

pay-off loot, a Caesar walks among *his* people. To accompany the montage, James Brown sings "Be a Bad Mother." Though he rules the same black serfs for individual desires as did the Mafia before him, street kids adore their demigod. Black Caesar, elitist shortcomings ignored, exterminates white rats wallowing in pimped luxury. Bred by struggle in the Harlem jungle, Caesar and his Tarzan supermen far outclass their seedy overseers. The theater audience applauds each victory.

Black Caesar buys the apartment where his mother is a maid. He gives it to her as a present. He doesn't take it over, or burn it. He buys it. Then he begins his symbolic put-down of white American life. He throws the former landlady's mink coats off the balcony, and when the white woman returns to get laid by him, he throws her out.

As absurd as it may be, the final scene in *Black Caesar* is a ritual epiphany, the highest moment in present Black Warrior mythology. The black warrior's coming to slay the white devil. It's a dream come true.

Unlike the busy black-made films, the stage is uncluttered and glows in a dim light. It is hypnotic and operatic. Black Caesar, wounded, limps in. Captain McKinney's gun snaps to the side of his head. McKinney drags Caesar across the floor and points to a shoeshine kit, beneath an erect American flag. Before Caesar dies, he is to give the titillated commissioner one last shine. On his knees Black Caesar spits on the shoes. Then he swings up and knocks the gun away. Armed with a shoeshine box, on the altar of America, Black Caesar smashes and smashes the police commissioner's face. The audience howls.

Ending on a high note of well-received audience catharsis, this warrior ritual again denies a glimmer of consciousness. Black Caesar exploits blacks without a word of criticism. His empire of drugs and prostitutes is no different from the Mafia before him. Such distinctions cannot be expected from a white-conceived black film, but what about *Superfly?* It remains to be seen if *Sweet Sweetback,* acclaimed in 1971 by Huey Newton and the "first truly revolutionary black film," advances consciousness toward true self-identity and realization.

6. *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasss Song*

Melvin Van Peebles's film is considered a landmark of black cinema. Shot in 19 days on a shoestring budget, it took great personal determination to get it made, and even more resourcefulness in marketing it. In 1971, *Sweetback* ranked as the largest grossing independent production of its time.

SWEETBACK: Auteur as performer

Peebles wrote, directed, produced, edited, scored the music, and acted in *Sweetback*. He terms it a radicalization of a pimp starring the black community, conceived from a black perspective in the black aesthetic. If this is true, *Sweetback* should be the first film which directs black values free of white interference.

Sweetback begins when a young boy living in a whorehouse (played by Peebles's son) is sexually initiated by a 40-year-old prostitute. Then, by werewolf metamorphosis, the child between her legs becomes Badass Auteur Melvin Van Peebles. Sweet Sweetback humps right into the next scene, where he's the main event of a sex show. His enthralled partner utters, "Sweetback, you're the greatest." At this cue, a white woman in the audience offers herself to Sweetback, two cops arrive, all embarrassed, and bust the show.

In a few minutes, the cops are kicking in the balls of some black radical (where he came from and why they're whomping him is beyond me.) And Sweetback, who has nothing to gain, whomps the cops. Saved, the black brother asks Sweets, "Where we going now?" Of course Badass spits back, "Where'd you get that 'we' shit?" and splits.

With a manhunt on, the tissue plot is complete. Dressed in gold velvet, Sweetback runs through artsy-fartsy camera work, runs through black kook fringes, and runs classic structures into street myths. All the while, a steadfast black community chorus comments upon the hero's progress and leads the verbal attack against white forces.

Western standards of lucidity and linear thought are worth two cents. Everything is cartooned and impressionistic. Oral communication between blacks and whites is chained into a "yessiring" framework. When Sweetback communicates, he does so with his penis and fists.

In sharp contrast is the blubbery radical, Mr. Moomoo. Dressed in a multicolored showercap, he sprays Secret, fumbles amid douche bags, and jabbers about "hanging low and playing it cool."

More running breeds a foot montage, and a Rochester black eagerly shines a cop's shoes with his ass. Sweetback escapes to Mexico while the ghetto chorus chants, "They bled your mother,

they bled your sister, but they won't bleed you." The final message comes in billboard caps, "A BADASS NIGGER IS COMING BACK TO COLLECT SOME DUES."

Sweetback is a very intense film which successfully attracted the black masses. Its cartooning, frenetic technique and wailing songs represent the tentative film grammar of the black aesthetic. But the type of myths it plays with and its lack of critical perspective weigh heavy against it. The most obvious myth it employs is the Black Stud. Peebles never seems to reject it nor seems to relish it, but always leans upon it for audience identification. The evidence of this ambiguous approach comes in a "fucking duel" with the female head of a motorcycle gang. Although she writhes in ecstasy as Sweetback wins, he doesn't express any enjoyment.

Sweetback is not so much a spokesman for the black community as he is an isolated, monadic entity. Speaking only 40 words in the film, this "brown Clint Eastwood" is a man of action but of limited consciousness. His run-when-he-must, screw-when-he-can approach defeats communal resistance, organization, and identity.

There is no grappling with ideas, and there is nothing here parallel with such "revolutionary" works as *Salt of the Earth, Battle of Algiers,* or *State of Siege.* Together with Black Caesar and Superfly, Sweetback strikes out against imagined enemies hyped into rabid racists, but nowhere do we see the forces that placed him in the whorehouse and created the human refuse scattered everywhere.

Blacks are degraded. Sweetback is raped as a child. The radical Mr. Moomoo is a bozo. Black sex and black womanhood remain trampled. In fact, Sweetback rapes a black woman at a rock concert. The pimp and prostitute culture remains uncriticized. Born from a whorehouse, Sweetback never confronts the meaning of his existence. At least the happy darky shining shoes turns his act into some white perversion.

Sweetback cannot be a fine example of black self-realization. It holds no vision, just mythical revenge intended to keep the attention of its audience. This fairy tale fails to clarify a unified view of past, present and future. Males in the audience enjoy fantasies. Everyone feels dressed for the ceremony on the streets, but a culture must have a purpose for existing, not just a fantastic panache to wear.

In *Superfly* and *Black Caesar* we witness an ebony Horatio Alger story, whose scenario is the ghetto jungle of Social Darwinism. They claw out "me first." They succeed in creating a mythology in their wake. Superfly and the Mack are sheer mythic images which provide fantastic escape for a poor preindustrial culture. Though differences between Anglo and Afro dialect, art, and dress are stressed in each filmic ritual, the social relationships between members within their cultures seem akin. Melvin Van Peebles doesn't want any of "this 'we' shit." Only Sonny Carson will return home to realize "our dreams."

7. Sonny Carson

This last film selection is an odd place to end. It's not a *black* black film, but a white-directed autobiographical black work. Under the guidance of Michael Campus, *Sonny Carson* traces the growth of a ghetto child thru adolescence to the brink of adulthood, where is presented the promise of a true, selfless leader. Locked in Brooklyn alleys, Sonny commands The Lords against The Hawks in vendettas of strength and ego. Around The Lords swirl ghetto-dialect, reggae-tinged song, and Baptist pulpit stomping (the technical assistance of author Sonny Carson authenticates the period). "How we gonna do it? We're gonna do it to death!" Jumping and chanting, The Lords get ready for another ritual rumble.

Fortunately, we get beneath this war party revelry. For friends there is affection, and support of their life dream. In a central scene, the inner group swap fantasies. Each wishes to be a star: one to be the world's best dancer (although he says he'll end up a pimp), another to be the captain of the Queen Mary. Much like the surreal tenor of Ralph Ellison's work, *Invisible Man,* the white world and its implanted illusions are never fully perceived. With everybody busy killing each other, it remains an "outside" dreamland.

THE EDUCATION OF SONNY CARSON

True to the consciousness of the times, Sonny, played without faltering by Rony Clanton, only understands white society in terms of tree-like teenagers filling a school fishbowl. The myth of another waiting world remains believable until Sonny steals $100 for a comrade's funeral. Enter two cops delirious with racist hate and drooping egos. They decimate Sonny and send him from his ghetto cell to a prison cell.

In his first trip from home, Sonny finds a prison jammed with blacks, guarded by whites. All the young dudes who tried to get "outside" are inside. An older, battered friend warns, "They won't let you out until you're broken."

Sonny learns, fights, and survives. He returns spirit intact to find both friend and lover lost to drugs, the gang disbanded. Shattered is the naive dream of a life of leisure—the immigrants' notion that somewhere the streets are lined with gold. In its place is Sonny's commitment to the undream-like task of aiding his stricken people and defending their honor.

8. Metaphors in Black & Blue

Unifying these films is an uneven stream of social realism and physical black culture. On screen the mimesis of a black man's life is punctuated by a rap to the head or a kick to the groin. The struggles are framed by songs or primal screams.

To varying degrees, the first four films establish the reactionary mythology of the Warrior-Stud. Gone is white-inspired Amos 'n' Andy, but blacks degrade each other throughout. While romanticizing the warriors' distinct style, the various white and black film-makers can't think of a creative framework by which to order black experience. The consciousness of these demigods is limited to their primary American experience, an abusive order of master/slave relationships.

Sonny Carson diverges. It begins as another warrior myth, then takes time for tender love between black men and black women. When people are destroyed by white social forces, the reaction is not undirected hate. In fact, racism, isolated in the bodies of crazy cops, is barely perceived as such. Without an overview of its intent, racism appears to Sonny as random lunacy.

After a long, unjust fight, Sonny is conscious of his being, and realizes the enemy which has destroyed the lives of his friends is not the gang on the next block, but something beyond his block. It is an omnipotent power which directs forces on many levels against young black leaders. It will put heroin in their veins and encourage infighting.

Sonny Carson does not name names, or show people fighting together against their common enemy. But it is a starting point for black cinema.

9. Yes, our hopes are high,
our plans colossal!
And we hitch our wagon to a star!
We can move mountains,
says St. Paul the great apostle
And yet! How heavy one cigar!
—from "The Great Song of Capitulation,"
Mother Courage,
by Bertolt Brecht

Presently, black cinema appears to be treading water, and new black films are scarce (at least on the distribution level.) The most recent entries are peripheral films made by whites using blacks *for whites. Mandingo* and *The Klansman* are cartooned, decadent, sadistic works which continue a

tradition of whites determining the future for blacks. It's merely a question of whether white liberals will supplant the overt racists.

Black cinema needs to become a community cinema with a new set of myths. Then it can aid self-determination. But the pressures against such a cinema are immense. The economic nature of the media, profit-oriented with large capital investment, may forbid it. Vested white interests will be against spreading a gospel which contradicts its own and threatens to destroy its economic base by raising the consciousness of not only black viewers, but white viewers too. A so-called revolutionary film like *Sweetback* met with the utter disdain of the white industry.

Black cinema's fate is not sealed. It's too young. Its audience has not yet been trained to heel to black-washed stock forms and techniques of individually oriented white cinema. Determined men like Melvin Van Peebles prove a film can be distributed directly to black audiences, though using unconventional means (he silk-screened T-shirts and leafletted from corners).

The opportunity remains to explore new techniques and styles of a black aesthetic. Besides language, dress, and music, the black cinema can reflect upon non-European interpersonal relationships, and non-European economic relationships. In defining black sexuality, having avoided the inhibitions of WASP society, it could forsake the pimp-prostitute romanticizing. As Bertolt Brecht raised the consciousness of his audience within a form designed for Everyman, black cinema can create a *Three Penny Opera* for the center city.

GIDEON BACHMANN

Films Are Animal Events

BERNARDO BERTOLUCCI TALKS ABOUT HIS NEW FILM, "1900"

Bertolucci has just finished shooting his first film since Last Tango in Paris, *the monumental epic* 1900 *which has been in front of the cameras since July of last year, and is not expected to be finished before the end of 1975. Sterling Hayden, Burt Lancaster, Dominique Sanda, Donald Sutherland, Stefania Sandrelli, Robert De Niro, Gerard Depardieu, Laura Betti, Maria Monti, Romolo Valli, and hundreds of other actors have been employed to populate the screen in this most expensive film ever made in Italy. The film tells the stories of two families through the first half and more of the century; rich and poor are juxtaposed in what Bertolucci hopes will be a monument to the history of political consciousness among the agricultural classes in central Italy.*

I went to see him shoot and stayed with him, twice, for a week. It became clear to me as soon as I arrived at the enormous farmyard in the neighborhood of Parma where the film is based, that Bertolucci is not shooting the film he had told me about two years ago at our last encounter. Then it was to have been a film about "the agony of the land, the disappearing culture of the earth." Instead he is filming the dream of a 34-year-old Italian intellectual, disappointed with the disappointment that surrounds him and convinced of his own conviction, who hopes to overcome the political debacle of the Italian Left in the years since 1968 with a political form of positiveness which he calls "popular." An undertaking useful, in the first place, to him and his companions in the

tradition of whites determining the future for blacks. It's merely a question of whether white liberals will supplant the overt racists.

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Party, in order to assist themselves in the maintenance of a political identity in a society that tends to destroy, in the individual, the dimension of social utility.

All told, the two weeks were not pleasant. Bertolucci has become very big, very famous, very quickly. The traditional cordial atmosphere of an Italian film set, where people are first and foremost friends and only in the second place collaborators, that joviality that characterises the Italians when they are content and working, economically safe and not called upon to think too much, was missing. Perhaps it was the encroaching daily fog of the Po Valley, perhaps the intuition that the story being put into images was only partly based on reality and that the other part was hope, that created in all of us a feeling of uneasiness. Tensions abounded, tempers exploded. But above the turmoil, the somewhat fatter, somewhat hairier Bertolucci, getting to look more like Balzac every day, towered in nonchalance; only the film counts for him, only the end product. With other great artists he seems to share at least one basic quality: self-centeredness and the talent to exploit talent. Whatever the pain of the process, he never seems to doubt the pleasure of final victory.

BACHMANN: *In the American cinema, which you love, we have epics like* Giant *or like* Gone with the Wind, *but nobody seems to have wanted to carry a film over a series of generations in the Italian cinema. What makes you want to get bigger and bigger?*

BERTOLUCCI: The idea was born some time ago, even before we made *Last Tango*. We've been thinking about this film really for a long time. (By "we" I mean myself, my brother Giuseppe, and Kim Arcalli, my editor and co-scenarist.) In fact in the beginning we wanted to make six long installments for television. But when we started to look at the material, we realized that it would be impossible to make this thing for TV, for an infinity of reasons: political, moral, and so on, because television, oh well . . . So we decided to make it into a film. It's the first time that I've been three years over a script. Just the writing took more than a year and a half, then the elaboration another year, and on down. We've gone through so many stages that the story has become very stratified.

What's the story?

It's the story of two destinies, of two boys who through a quirk of fate are born on the same day in 1900 and together traverse the whole century right up to our days, and maybe beyond, into the future. It's their story, but it's also a lot of other things.

Do they die in the film?

I won't tell you the ending; anyway we haven't written it yet. In any case the ending remains fairly open. We have a variety of ideas for it, but since films always take a different road than one plans for them . . . especially a film like this. They are like ships in the night, like a galleon that departs. One makes it depart, but then it takes its own direction. So we left the end open for the time being. Another thing: the film is conjugated in a very particular time dimension: a film about the land had to follow the changing seasons, and so the film is divided into seasons, too. There is a great summer that stands for infancy and adolescence. Then there is an autumn and a winter that stand for the years of fascism and war, and then spring returns and a new summer after the liberation, and so on. Thus we see the seasons with a somewhat invented sense of time.

What is the dramatic structure of the film?

It's a day, the 25th of April 1945, the Italian Day of Liberation, and it includes the whole century. We took it as a sort of symbolic day on which is unleashed, on which flowers this peasants' utopia. In this Emilia farm a kind of peasants' republic is founded, a small autonomous state, and this day includes all the conditioning, all the needed facts, just because the day itself has happened. But it does not only contain the past; it also contains the future. Thus the narrative base of the film is the 25th of April. Upon the passage of this day I insert these seasons of the lives of these two characters, of which one is born in the family of the landowner and the other in the family of the peasant.

The film is thus not based on your personal memories?

Oh yes it is. It's true that on that day I was only three years old, but how can you date your

memories? It is true that I myself remember nothing of that day. I vaguely remember some German soldiers seen from afar during a search. But certain things I do not think it is necessary to have lived, oneself. The same was true for *The Conformist,* which takes place in years that I did not live at all. I applied a sort of cinematographic memory. The cinema is a gigantic, collective memory, which can help one a lot in this way. I made *The Conformist* just by remembering the films of those years. Even when they are fictional, if films concern the present they are always violently documentary—I am telling you that the cinema always ends up being a documentary.

Perhaps the cinema leaves a memory that is stronger than the one caused by reality? And that if you base your film on a version of reality that derives from other films, it won't, in the end, relate to things that really happened?

I don't know, but I do know that in any case every generation sees reality in a recognizable code, in a way that is familiar to it, and thus relates to its epoch even through facts that may only be fiction. My memory, for *The Conformist,* was based on French and American films. But this film I am making now is different from *The Conformist* and also different from *Last Tango,* because in this film I do not base myself only on my own memories, but on *our* memories; it's a film that has the spirit of a novel, not a tale like the other films, and it is also less linked to the present of a novel, not a tale like the other films, and it is also less linked to the present. It contains, for example, also the memories of my father, of my grandmother.

Had you spoken to them about these ideas?

It would not have been necessary to talk, apart from the fact that they are dead. I always talked, as I was growing up. This is material that has really helped me. It has remained with me.

After you made Before the Revolution, *did you always intend to come back here to make another film on this land?*

I did return; in the very village where we are now I shot *The Spider's Stratagem*—here in Roncole Verdi. Two hundred meters from here is the villa where Alida Valli lived in that film. *Stratagem* was like notes for this film, like the location research.

So your own personal roots are of importance, of creative importance, in your work?

In my films there has always been this type of dialectic: not a conflict, but a relationship between father and son, that has always been very present. In this case, since in the three generations there are two families, and it thus makes up a lot of relationships, I think I have gone beyond that original dialectic. Everything that happens in this film on a personal level is thus relegated to have a larger, historical meaning. It's the story of a people, of the peasants of this area, a people developing their own creativity to build themselves a history. A history in the Marxist sense. Thus a film that set out to concern itself with what seemed to be the agony of peasant culture has been transformed by the peasants themselves who managed to pass from a pre-political moment in the beginning of the century to a political consciousness of much greater meaning.

Are you comparing peasant culture with political consciousness?

Through consciousness they managed not to lose the culture. Even today, when the villages seem to be empty, and with everything seeming to be mechanized (the peasants are driving about on those enormous red machines, the combines for harvesting grain), even today the relationships, when you get to know them better, between these men and their traditions is clear; they haven't lost their original culture. On the contrary, they keep it ferociously alive in the way they relate to the world.

But their number shrinks . . .

In this region less than in others. Much less than in the South, much less even than in Tuscany. Thus, the dialectic which in my film has always been that of son/father, now becomes the contest of peasant/landowner. Exploiter and exploited.

In what way do you express this contest in the film?

Through various episodes. The first and most important is the peasants' strike of 1908. A strike which united peasants from various levels: day laborers, tenant farmers, lessees, farmhands, and so on. These are historical moments which we have naturally somewhat elaborated and manipulated. Moments were picked when collective passion exploded. Apart from 1908 there is the end of the

First World War, and then a scene in 1921, at the funeral of four old men killed by fascists at a fire set in a "*casa del popolo.*" It's a big funeral that conveys the feeling of great unity, of strength—followed, however, by the breakdown when fascism enters upon the scene in 1922.

You said the film has the spirit of a novel. Do you think that is a form particularly suitable for Italians?

No, in fact I think in film there are no precedents for this method in Italy. But we do have precedents on a literary level. But I think that the peasants in Pavese, for example, are very different. As far as filmic precedents are concerned, I think they exist only in the cinema of other countries, perhaps in Dovzhenko . . .

Do you see a parallel between this optimistic funeral which is then followed by the 1922 events, and things that are happening in Italy today, like for example the successful referendum against the abolition of divorce?

Perhaps there is a parallel if I compare some of my characters who represent fascism with the fascists of today. In the film fascism is represented above all by two characters, a man and a woman who live together. There is a sort of hired hand who becomes the boss of the farm in the owner's absence, who is called Attila, and is played by Donald Sutherland. He uses fascism as a sort of social ladder. A kind of small country Macbeth, whose Lady Macbeth is played by Laura Betti. There seems to be a parallel between the ferocious rationale of these two and the fascists of today.

You mean in an abstract, psychological way, or physically, actively?

They live in the same dimension of senselessness; their actions are just as senseless as those of the fascists who put bombs on trains today. It is, however, a senselessness that is used politically for very specific purposes.

You must have made some discoveries of a political nature after beginning to work on this material three years ago, because now your attitude is so much more positive, especially as far as the conscousness of the peasants is concerned.

Yes, great discoveries. I can describe them very simply, for example on the level of the faces. When I started driving around with my assistant to look for people to use in the film, I was very worried. But no. For example, we went to see the people working in the cow barns. We were expecting workers' faces, running electrical milking machines and other devices, with those typical industrial faces. But the faces we saw were the old faces, those conscious faces of peasants. So that was my first discovery: instead of things having changed and nothing being left, I found that the peasants' world was intact and culturally very alive. When we talked two years ago about this, I hadn't yet come here to look. The reality that I encountered is much more positive than what I had imagined.

What are the characteristics that you found in the peasants which made you change your mind? What are they like as persons, today?

I could talk of patience, I could talk of a certain sweetness, I could talk of a subtle, refined hypocrisy, and I could talk of their great vitality and their attachment to their traditions. Take the relationship they have with their animals: they are extraordinary, these peasants with their animals. The relationship with the pig, for example—all this care, and then the punctual, yearly slaughter. It's a marvellous relationship of great communication and of compassion.

How are you using these discoveries dramatically?

They are the basis for the story development within the film. There are these two boys, one of whom is called Olmo (Elm Tree), who is the peasant, and the other is Alfredo, the son of the landowner. They live this long summer of childhood together, the season of their first sexual awakening, in which their friendship is born, and they discover the world. At the age of 8 or 9 they discover reality as they participate in those great strikes; this is their first encounter with reality. Then there is a jump, more or less from 1910 to 1918, when we find one of them, the peasant's son, returning from the war, to which the landowner's son hasn't gone. They find each other again and live very closely together those three years or so before the oncoming of fascism. Olmo of course is a socialist. Alfredo is a bourgeois, but of a very liberal slant. In fact he tries to share, as much as possible, the daily struggles of the peasants,

together with Olmo. But then one day, at the beginning of fascism, Alfredo's father dies, and Alfredo himself becomes the landowner, and finds that he must automatically, as if condemned to it, be faithful to his identity as a landowner. That is where the conflicts erupt. The two destinies become separate, in a way. Alfredo is a member of the middle classes, one of those agrarian bosses who, even if they did not directly pay the fascist squadrons, had a certain complicity in its rise. The other boy becomes almost an outcast, a persecuted fugitive, because he's become a communist. On the other hand they remain geographically close, because they work this earth—that is the peasant works the earth of the landowner, one works for the other, that is why I have picked such typical cases. In the end, I find that these people are the reverse faces of the same personality, that each represents one part of a complex character. Thus they are not only representatives of a dialectic of a social nature, but they can sort of help us to peep into the inner structures of the century. The end will probably be the moment when both of them, after a whole life, in old age, find the courage to realize what they are. The deeper sense of the film is that this century is the century in which the idea of the boss dies, the *figura del padrone* disappears.

I said the *idea* of the boss dies. As a social individual, as a social fact. But of course it hasn't happened yet. It's a bit of a utopia, yet.

Aren't you afraid that your idea of the survival of peasant culture is also somewhat utopian? We would all be so happy if it were only true . . .

Well, it seems to work in the country . . . all of us, shooting in the country, feel well, the actors just slip into the characters, even the foreigners, like Burt Lancaster and Sterling Hayden, who in the film are seen, always, through the eyes of the two children; I had wanted them to be a bit more mythological, but both of them, with great naturalness, have become two real lives, they move very well inside the characters, who seem to have been tailored to their own reality. Maybe this sounds silly, but in nature things always work very naturally. When one finds oneself playing the part of someone linked in some way to the land, a sort of common memory awakes, a sort of genetic memory, I don't know . . .

Politically speaking, you think this is the moment to make positive films?

For ten years, I mean in the sixties, we have done nothing but complain. Crying, lamenting, telling our anxieties in film, but now *basta!* We have to start to try and *solve* the problems. The cinema of the sixties was a cinema of weeping. I think we have now changed and that many things have changed. For example the jump between the small number of people that used to see one's films and the vast number that sees them now. That is really a noticeable change. And not just a change in the quantity of spectators, but a qualitative change, too. I have felt this very much.

You mean to say that spectators have become more intelligent and thus one can now make films that are seen by more people? This, too, seems to me to be a rather utopian idea.

Yes. In fact, the reasons why people continue to go to the cinema are horrible, foul. They are publicity-type reasons, that is, brainwashing reasons. But it's all the same whether people have their brains washed by a bigger or more elaborate poster, or by voices that circulate saying that a certain film includes scandalous scenes. Once you have accepted the publicity principle, which is a horrible, shitty principle, it's useless to complain later. To me it gives no displeasure to think that they go to see my film because there is a sodomy sequence in which instead of vaseline they use butter. Because the growth in the number of spectators, even if it occurs because of scandalousness, is fine with me. The cinema is a very curious concoction. it is also made up a scandals, and since we make films in this kind of society, one has to accept these. It's wrong to think too much about this. It's a question of liberty, really. The cinema, in this respect, is far behind literature, and today, making films instead of writing novels—which is something I could have ended up doing, after writing poetry for a while—I want to obtain the same liberty I would have enjoyed if I was writing novels. Only through liberty of expression can the relationship with the spectator be improved.

Another reason to make a film "in the spirit of a novel"?

It would be a bit too utilitarian to call it that. A bit too simple. It would be a simple way, also, to

differentiate this film of mine from my previous ones. At the same time it would be a limiting statement, because once you say "novel" you begin to think of nineteenth-century models, and this comparison seems unjust to me. Because the film really has very little of that nineteenth-century spirit, except at the very beginning. Its narrative structure is very different. Since in films one can be very free with the use of the element of time, with the stratification of time elements, I have been able to give it a very particular basic structure. This 25th of April on which day the peasant utopia takes shape—their attempt to take over the land of the boss which they have been working and to create a small socialist state—this day is the temporal framework, just as this enormous courtyard of the farm, which is the farm of the film, is its geographical framework. This day of utopia contains the century. It's a temporal unit, a very special day, different from all others. The premise of this day lies in the past, but the day also contains the future. In this way, narratively, structually, the film has no feeling of anything nineteenth-century-like. It does not have a linear structure.

I had actually intended the word "novel" as an indication of contents structure; since there are all these fates, characters, times, generations and events which mix in time and in a social dimension and interact respectively, it seemed to me that in Italy there is little precedent for this, especially in terms of the public's ability to extend its attention span to more than an immediately recognizable significance.

But that significance is there. The real, profound story of the film is how the peasantry day by day, has invented, has created, its own history, its own historical significance.

Have the external facts that you describe actually occurred in Italy?

Some have. But I wanted to tell you this: the film has this structure which criss-crosses the century because the development of peasant conscousness has been laborious. At the beginning of the film there is a pre-political moment, where the reactions are still on the level of individuals. The great strike of 1908 is thus seen from the point of view of the peasants, who react in an emotional way, without having, as yet, any political instruments at their disposal. In a scene we are about to shoot today, for example, a peasant who has been informed by the landowner that half of his pay will be deducted because of losses to the harvest caused by a storm, cuts off his ear and hands it to the landowner. The ear happens to be the most important thing he owns; he's got two enormous ears. It's a very individualistic protest-gesture, still, which synthesizes, however, the desperation, the misery, of a whole group of peasants, and which in the next scene is immediately carried further as I show how the idea of the strike is born. In fact, historically speaking, that is how those strikes did start. Thus, to answer you more precisely, there is always an intervention on the level of fantasy in order to arrive at the fundamental points of the historical process of the formation of political consciousness in this area.

Do you mean to indicate, then, that from these beginnings there has been a slow formation of conscousness which could have, in 1945, resulted in a real change, but that such a change did not occur, after all?

Yes, but I am not accusing anybody for the fact that it didn't. Because that which did not happen on a historical level, did in fact happen on a consciousness level. The peasants in 1945 in some way *did* kill the boss. There is a scene of one of those "popular trials," where the landowner is condemned to death. It's the execution that is then postponed. That is to say, the boss is dead, but the moment to kill him physically hasn't come yet. But in their consciousness the trial has taken place and the sentence has been carried out. There are, in fact, many historical examples of small groups that tried to become autonomous around the 25th of April 1945; they decided to occupy lands and some actually did execute some fascists.

It seems to me that the making of films which are different from your plans for them is somewhat habitual for you; you did the same thing with Tango, *where the finished film is totally different from the script. You don't, for example, continue to feel the need to express regret for the loss of elements of the culture of the land?*

I had started out on the classical trip of nostalgia, like in many of my films. It was the

nostalgia for a peasant culture I had known in childhood, and which I had thought dead. I had thought to have seen its death. But as soon as I got back here I began to suspect that I had been wrong, and that I wasn't, after all, going to make a film about a vanished world. It's the people themselves who made me understand this. So I don't feel the same kind of regret any more.

As a child, did you actually live in the country?

Yes, for thirteen years, in a village called Bacchanelli; it's not even a village, just a fraction of one, about four houses. Six kilometers from Parma.

And now you no longer think that you've seen the death of that world? Even if some things are being saved, it's useless to pretend that the culture of the land isn't in decline everywhere.

I have always felt this decadent, bourgeois need to live the last gasps of agrarian culture, etc. But if it may be true that the agrarian culture of the landowners is dead, it is certainly not true that the agrarian culture of the peasants is dead. Because the landowners' culture is a recent development, it's a nineteenth-century affair, since the agrarian middle class came to power when the big feudal estates were beginning to be split up with the passage of liberalism, let's say. But the peasant culture is much more ancient. It is, in fact, an archaic culture which has remained vital to this day. My prejudices were transformed under my own eyes, day by day, and so I am making a different film.

And thus you have changed its political message?

Politics is a matter of reality. It's inherent in the faces, the hands, the voices of the people. The film, as a political instrument, could be a bridge between those who go to the cinema, the people of the cities, and the peasants.

I must insist that there is a difference between peasant culture and a class consciousness. One could even maintain that the natural equilibria of seasons, rhythms, relations and interactions with nature, in the traditional peasant world, have always, in the entire history of agriculture, which goes back something like 7,000-8,000 years, been linked in some way to hierarchical, social structures of the nature that you call exploiter/exploited. I can't see why in a socialist world values should manage to save themselves which are considered outdated by industrial progress.

Country communism is different from city communism. The people in the country, although they are completely involved in the class struggle in a general, conscious way, have learned to maintain their faith in their archaic roots which are being transformed in accordance with their new political consciousness. It is not a matter of two separate, distinct concepts. It's an evolutionary process. It is not a giving up of an ancient culture in favor of a new one. On the contrary, the peasants today conceive the socialist-communist ideal as a means for saving their primitive culture. I am absolutely convinced of this.

I am not. The example of countries where socialism has advanced does not lend itself to this utopia. Pragmatically speaking, political consciousness-forming is based on progress and thus on industrialization, and inevitably leads to a basic change. When the individual ceases to be the measure of the agrarian relationship, how can a civilization be saved that is based on the satisfaction that man, as an individual or as a small family group, has always derived from this very private relationship to that piece of land which is his, that grain he has grown, that cow he has milked, and that pig he has brought up? It seems to me that what we grandiosely call peasant culture depends to a large extent on the sense of property, of territoriality, of defense of one's own area; in other words on basic elements of genetic origin, common to all primates. It may seem like a reactionary idea to you . . .

In China, where the Great Leap Forward has been accomplished, this does not seem to happen, however. I don't want to judge a reality I haven't seen, but we have read books, like *Report from a Chinese Village*, etc., in which it is clearly outlined how under socialism it has been possible to find harmony between past and present. From what I have seen here, the process of industrialization on this land, which on the one hand has been very violent, has, on the other hand, brought about a quite harmonious equilibrium. Even if we had a communist government in Italy today, there is no intention of changing anything. There is only the

intention to conserve. To save that which industrialization of a capitalistic type is trying to destroy. To save this culture that is so closely linked to the hardship of the people, their pain, the change of the seasons, nature. In the film I am doing the same thing, by filming a living landscape. It is not a landscape which contains, even if in a very picturesque manner, the principle of its own death. I would like to see people, as a result of seeing this film, return to the land instead of leaving it. In any case I think that the movement away from the land has been stopped, and that in a small way there seems to be a beginning of the opposite trend. Once the land is administered in a more democratic way, in a more human way, there will no longer be this hostility towards nature. With nature, too, there will be a more normal relationship, a less dramatic relationship.

The only return to the land which I see, in Italy or elsewhere, is that of bourgeois intellectuals who rebuild old farmhouses as refuges, and that of groups of young dreamers who try to escape the destructiveness of cities by creating autonomous collectives.

Those may just be the first symptoms of a return. It is often the intellectuals who are the first to embrace new ideas. In any case, no film ever has a direct political effect. But it *can* have a direct effect on the level of emotions. I am thus trying to create a political cinema somewhat different from that made in the sixties, which assumed that the spectator was in some way prepared and spoke to him in code. What I want to make today must be very popular. A cinema that goes back to popular forms. A cinema, however, that not only wishes to be popular inasmuch as it addresses itself to a large, popular audience, but also in that which it has to offer to that audience. We have films which are very commercial but not very popular. And then sometimes we have very popular films which nobody sees. What I mean, of course, is popular in the sense of popular culture.

And to approach the spectator on the level of his emotions you feel is a way towards making films which in that sense are more popular?

That would be rather a Brechtian approach, and would contradict all we have said. But when I analyze the reaction of people to Brecht I find that the reactions are very emotional, except that one becomes involved beyond the point that Brecht intended.

In any case you want to involve the spectator, and according to your definition of "popular" you attribute an importance to his ability to identify with the work. It seems strange to me, then, that your film is so filled with acts of violence, both in its depiction of sexuality and in its description of political or interpersonal work relationships. Of course I have only seen small sections of the script, but it seems to me that the only sexual acts that you depict in detail are the more scabrous ones. The poetic ones are only indicated, not shown.

The person who represents the fascist in the film, this Attila, has a historical justification as a symptom of the social condition of the period at the end of World War I. But apart from that he is also the materialization of the aggression that exists in the people around him, which these others succeed n repressing, or which they, in any case, have chosen not to express. He is like the summary concentrate of all the aggressive forces, all the negative and destructive aspects dormant especially in the two protagonists of the film. His ferocity is absurd and senseless in the same way—and this is very interesting, because I believe that to talk of the past is constructive only if you put it in juxtaposition to the present—it's absurd and senseless like the ferocity of the fascists of our own days, which are only partially justified as instruments of a political nature in a historical context, whatever that nature may be. Today, in Italy, we have a working class that will forever prohibit the return of fascism. Fascist provocations have the function of creating chaos, in order to push the country in the direction of a more forceful government, etc., but when you observe things closely, you realize that these are basically absurd and useless gestures, destined to fail.

But there is a parallel for these actions in the Germany of 1930-1932 . . .

Our situation is different. The conquests achieved by the working classes since the end of World War II are irreversible and we are better prepared today, and thus stronger. In any case I believe that at this point it is necessary to be very optimistic, and not to succumb, as many do, to the

temptation of the pleasure of fear of a *coup d'etat* and other grave things. There is an air about, a sort of *complaisance,* whereby people almost seem to enjoy the keeping alive of a perennial anxiety. Perhaps because life has become so flat. As Gramsci put it, who founded the Italian Communist Party: "optimism of willpower and pessimism of intelligence" . . .

The workers in pre-Nazi Germany were optimistic, too, and had a large popular vote behind them . . .

I prefer confidence to fear, anyway. A utopia like the one that explodes in my film on the 25th of April is neither optimistic nor pessimistic, it's just utopian. A utopia is the prefiguration of what could be the relationships between people and the new ways of living and of running this earth.

Loading onto the shoulders of this Attila the weight of all this violence, which the other characters suppress, did you mean to say that all of us, in our souls, carry the seed of violence?

Certainly; aggression lives in all of us, and expresses itself through sexuality as well. I have made a film about this topic. At the base of modern sex you will find sadomasochism. That means, automatically, that you will find a dialectic of violence and aggression in *all* social relationships.

In this sense, too, the film you are making is different from what you seem to have planned. A lot of the violence seems to be added as you go along. For example, in the script the peasant does not cut off his ear, and the strikers do not slash the udders of the cows to protest against the injustice of the landowner and his strikebreakers. Interestingly enough it seems to me that the violent scenes you have added are largely self-destructive gestures.

Films are animal events. Once you have caused them to be born, they move under their own steam, they assume their own direction. This is happening to me with this film, too, even though I have tried to imprison it in a preceding political cage. But ideologies differ; there are live ideologies and dead ideologies. My film will succeed in avoiding the dead ones and will pick the most alive itineraries within reality.

Thus the film guides you?

Yes, like Dr. Frankenstein and his creature. The creature stops listening to its creator. The film becomes something different than planned, as soon as the camera starts digging into reality. It is reality, finally, that gives the political strength to a work. I conceive reality as the basis of politics. Even if I invent, I invent on the basis of reality. I make the real more real. It's the problem of improvisation. I try to construct very precise spaces, characters, lights, and so on, in order to be able to have, within these very precise given facts, the most complete liberty to improvise. In order to let the film go into the direction that it must go, even if that turns out a different direction than the one I plan at the beginning. For me the relationship to my film is like the relationship with an animal, with which I have an exclusively instinctual and not a rational contact.

So you see yourself as a sort of catalyst in the chemical reaction between your work, your product, and reality, and not really as an author of new truths?

I think that's what all artists are. One always starts with oneself. All the films I have made seemed desperately autobiographical to me, but when I look at them again today, it seems to me that the autobiographical dimension has been completely decanted and consumed in the act of becoming film. Even if the origin was in memories or in a personal experience, the film-becoming burns all that out. The film exists for itself.

CHARLES WILLEFORD

From *Cockfighter* to *Born to Kill*

Critics and moviegoers normally look, by necessity, only at the finished product of a lengthy, massive, and technologically complex process. It is useful to remember how different this social process looks to the people who experience it, and especially to gain some insight into how the basic choices confronted by the screenwriter, director, producer, and performers were actually made, rather than to have to piece them out by after-the-fact speculation. We would like, in coming issues, to present case-history material that illuminates this collective process and helps us to understand its dynamics, its determinants, and its consequences for the films that result from it. The following article describes the pre-production work on a recent film from the point of view of the writer, who happened to be the author of the novel from which he was developing the screenplay.

Writing a screenplay for the first time is like having a second hemorrhoid operation: it is not something I would willingly do again.

When my agent, Mike Watkins, called from New York and told me that Roger Corman of New World Pictures had made me an offer for the screen rights to my novel, *Cockfighter,* my first reaction was to ask if I could write the screenplay.

"Sure," Mike said. "That's part of the deal, although the screenplay will be a separate contract."

Not every novelist wants to adapt his novel for the screen, but I had wanted to write a screenplay for some time, just to see if I could do it. I had even considered the mad idea of writing an original screenplay, on speculation. But to write a screenplay on speculation, knowing in advance how small the chances are for having it produced, is too much of a luxury for a writer who never has enough time to write anyway. But I certainly wanted to write the script for *Cockfighter.* I had spent eighteen months of research on the sport before I wrote the book, and I had lived with the characters—in my mind—for two additional years. I did not want to turn my novel over to a scriptwriter who did not have my experience with the sport, nor my special knowledge of the characters.

Cockfighter, in my opinion—which hasn't changed—is an ideal novel for a feature film. The sport itself is colorful, arcane to most people, and there are many possibilities for dramatic, pictorial action. The plot of the novel is based loosely, very loosely, on *The Odyssey*—although the arrangement of the chapters does not coincide with the incidents in *The Odyssey.* There are parallel characters, however, although their presentation is on the ironic side, with Frank Mansfield as the crafty Odysseus; Omar Baradinsky as Telemachus; Ed Middleton as Nestor; Mary Elizabeth as the faithful, long-suffering Penelope, and others, including Tom Peeples, the one-eyed moron, as Cyclops. The realization that Frank's struggles on the Southern Conference Cocking Schedule were on such a low level compared to Odysseus's adventures gave me an absurd delight when I wrote the novel.

When a novel is adapted for the screen, at least

Warren Oates on the left, John Scott on the right, and author Charles Willeford in the middle: a scene from BORN TO KILL.

half of it must be jettisoned; otherwise, the movie would be four hours long and the dramatic impact would be on a level with a Henry James play. But with *Cockfighter,* which was composed mostly of picaresque episodes anyway, I was sure that I could eliminate some of them without harm to the original plot, combine a few others by telescoping, and still have a script that would make the standard 90-minute film. In the end, I lost the Circe and Siren chapters, but who other than myself will ever know?

The timing of Roger Corman's offer could not have been more propitious. I had just gotten a one-year leave of absence from my teaching job to write a new novel, and I figured I could write the screenplay in four or five weeks and still have plenty of time to complete the novel during the rest of the year.

This was a naive supposition on my part, and it did not, of course, work out that way. I had not as yet discovered that a screenwriter's contract calls for three drafts of the screenplay, not just one. So I ended up by working three months on the screenplay, seven days a week (in the standard contract, Sundays and holidays are counted as working days), and perhaps another ten days after completing the final draft, making some additional changes at my own request. And later on, after Monte Hellman was assigned to direct the film, and had read the novel, he asked me to add a scene from the novel that I had omitted from the screenplay for the purposes of economy.

The three-draft screenplay contract is apparently a holdover from the thirties, when screenwriters worked for the big studios on a weekly salary, usually for six weeks at a clip. The writer has four weeks to write the first draft, which is then read by the producer. Conferences are held; the second draft is then written, and read by the producer, who usually reserves two weeks for his reading time between drafts. Then, after another conference between the producer and writer, the final draft is written. After completing each draft, the writer is paid one third of the agreed-upon sum.

The system has its advantages and disadvantages, but I have no quarrel with it. It gives the producer a good deal of control over the final product, if he wants to exercise it, but he would have that anyway, even if he received only one final draft. The system allows the writer time for experiments, which is a plus for him; and I was able to put this extra time to good use. When the final draft is accepted and paid off, the producer owns the script, and it becomes known as a "property," a horrifying term to a serious novelist. The producer can revise it again, or do anything

else he wants to do to it, including selling it, without the writer's permission. He certainly doesn't have to produce it. There are literally thousands of scripts in Hollywood that have been written and paid for that will never be produced. In this respect, Hollywood is a profligate as Mother Nature. The writer, then, if he wants to have his script filmed, must consider, first of all, the economics of film-making; and it was not my intention to write an unproducible script.

I decided, at the outset, to write a script that would enable a director to get at least six minutes of film per day in the can. But the major writing problem of a script, like any other form of fiction writing, is to determine the structure, and to have an effective introductory scene that establishes immediately the personality of the protagonist. If the skeletal structure of the story is strong enough, it will bear up under almost any number of cuts and changes.

The problem of introducing Frank Mansfield was another special problem because he does not talk throughout the novel, nor could he speak during the movie. The problem was easy enough to solve in the novel, because the character could "think," even though he didn't talk, but in the film his actions would have to indicate his thought processes. Warren Oates, who plays Frank Mansfield in the film, was delighted with the non-speaking role. He is in every scene, because the film is from the protagonist's point-of-view, but without lines to learn he had ample time to experiment with body language, movement, and acting techniques he had rarely had the opportunity to try in his earlier films.

I wrote the first draft on the west coast of Florida, where I have a small place on the beach. I can walk up the beach one way for about five miles, and down the other way for about two miles. It took three days of walking on the beach before I decided how I wanted to write the screenplay.

There are two ways: It can be written in master scenes, with just the action and dialogue indicated; or it can be structured, with each shot indicated, the music and lighting effects described, and with detailed descriptions of the sets and characters in the appropriate places. The latter method is the way scripts were written during the golden years of the major studios. The completed, structured script was then handed to the director, and in the studios where producers like Harry Cohn had absolute control all the director needed was a tape measure; and he wasn't allowed to make any changes.

Under the master-scene system, however, the director merely has a rough guide. The director himself must decide how to structure each shot and sequence, and he might end up with a finished product that bears no resemblance to the writer's intention. For example, it is a simple matter to make a very minor character assume an importance he doesn't deserve by having his face on-screen, in close-up, listening, as the other, more important characters deliver their lines off-camera. One has to be wary of actors in this respect, as well, because of the sound track. Darren McGavin is an expert at tromping on another actor's lines, and when this is done, the film, when it is edited, has to show McGavin on screen listening because the film has to be edited to show him leaping in with his own line. Although this is a director's problem during the shooting of the film, the writer should be aware of the possibilities.

By writing a structured script, then, the writer can indicate who should be on camera during each take—in close-ups, two-shots, cutaways, and so on—and when the script is read it will, or should, resemble a fairly tight rough cut of the completed film.

It goes without saying that the producer and the director will still make many changes in the structure and in the emphasis, both during the shooting period and in post-production editing, but with a well-thought-out guide before him, the director's job is made much easier because he doesn't have to sit up half the night wondering what he is going to do the next day in terms of structure.

The structured script, then, gives the writer a modicum of control over the way his story is to be told. To write a loose master-scene script, the way the majority of our films are written today, is an abrogation of the screenwriter's responsibility. If he is hired to write the script, because of his special knowledge of the characters, subject-

matter, and the story, the least he can do is to turn in the best screenplay he is capable of writing.

What it is reduced to is whether the screenwriter takes writing for the screen seriously or not, even though he knows that when he is finished with it the screenplay will become a "property." Despite the extra work and thought a structured script entails, if I ever write another script, it will be a structured screenplay. I also discovered, once production was begun, that the structured script was particularly helpful to the art director, who could dress the sets from my detailed descriptions without making disastrous errors in authenticity; and the wardrobe person was equally grateful because she knew precisely what each character was wearing in each scene, down to and including Frank Mansfield's white socks.

My first draft was 240 pages (a script is single-spaced, with double-spacing between descriptions and dialogue passages), and twice as long as the final draft. But because I had to write three drafts anyway, I wanted Roger to see all of the possibilities and options open on the first draft before cutting the script down in the second draft.

When I finished the first draft I went to Hollywood, and after a conference with Roger, I decided to stay there while I wrote the second draft. That way, we could discuss the script after every twenty pages or so, and I could make the second draft as tight as possible.

Hollywood is my home town, and although I hadn't been back to California since 1954, when I moved to Florida, I enjoyed my stay there despite my heavy work schedule. To meet the deadline, I had to write at least nine pages a day, and when you wake up in the morning knowing that somehow or other you have to write at least nine pages before you can go to sleep again that night, the edge is taken off your pleasure at the new day.

I worked in my room at the Hollwood-Roosevelt Hotel. I consider a hotel room the perfect place for writing, whether it is a sonnet or a film script, and besides, I have a great doctor. Because of circulation problems in my legs, my doctor told me not to type for more than 40 minutes at a time. At the end of 40 minutes I am supposed to walk "vigorously" for 20 or 30 minutes before returning to work.

It is also my practice to write the first page in the morning when I first get up, and before I urinate. This vicious practice gives a certain urgency to the first page of the day, but at least one can come back after breakfast knowing that there are only eight more pages to write that day.

And walking on Hollywood Boulevard was a nostalgic trip. Except that the bums and winos are dressed better than they were in the mid-thirties, there has been virtually no change. Steve Alaimo's Jesus Freaks are passing out the religious pamphlets instead of Aimee Semple Macpherson's disciples, but the Hollywood High School students still come out on their lunch hour to beg small change from tourists. (It is strange indeed to be hit up for small change by 16-year-old girls wearing $200 leather coats.) From my window I had an excellent view of the football field of Hollywood High, and during the long afternoons I watched the football team work out its plays as I worked out mine.

On my second meeting with Roger, he told me that he was going to direct the film himself. This was good news. As a director, Roger has signed 49 films, and I was familiar with his style. For several years now I have been showing some of his genre films to my cinema appreciation classes, and one of Roger's best shots is the long tracking take. For the cockfighting sequences, I was able to work several long tracking takes into the script. As it turned out, when the time came to shoot the film, Roger was unable to direct it because of some other commitments, and he assigned the job to Monte Hellman. This change did not necessitate

BORN TO KILL

Warren Oates and Patricia Pearcy: nonverbal communication in BORN TO KILL

any rewriting, however, and I was pleased when Monte used two or three long takes, plus some others of his own invention that had never occurred to me. When a very long tracking take is executed perfectly, it is a beautiful thing to watch. During the kidnapping scene in the farmhouse, in Roger's *Bloody Mama,* while Shelly Winters as Bloody Mama rants at the blindfolded victim, Pat Hingle, the camera creeps around the darkened room like a frightened spectator on tiptoes. The dialoque in this scene is abominable, but the directing, camerawork, and editing are magnificent. From an economical point of view, a three-minute take of a master scene is solid gold.

My conferences with Roger Corman and his chief honcha, Frances Kimbrough, were always brief, friendly, and productive. As a professional writer, I have worked with a good many different editors, but never with anyone quite like Roger Corman. On one occasion, I had a dreary scene that ran for nearly 12 pages, most of it exposition. It dragged, truly dragged, and I was unhappy with it.

"This scene is much too long," Roger said. "What I'd like here instead is a very short scene, something funny and outrageous."

"Me, too," I said eagerly. "What do you have in mind?"

"Nothing," Roger said, surprised that I had asked the question. "You're the writer."

This kind of criticism is ideal for a writer because it puts the responsibility where it belongs. I walked up and down Hollywood Boulevard for at least six miles before I got the idea I needed, but when I did I was able to cut the scene down to a funny, outrageous page-and-a-half.

The second draft was the hardest to write. The third and final draft, mostly tightening, telescoping and sharpening of dialogue, didn't present any major writing problems, and I was able—back in Florida—to meet the final deadline.

I had to wait another full year before a production date was set in Georgia, but the financing of the film was Roger's responsibility, not mine. It would take another ten pages to discuss the tight 24 days of shooting the film on location, but I want to state that I am doubly grateful to Monte Hellman: first, for his brilliant interpretation of the script; and second, for casting me in the role of Ed Middleton.

The film has been released under a new title, *Born to Kill,* but it was shown under the original title at the Edinburgh Film Festival last October. When the Winter issue of *Sight and Sound* came out, two film critics, Tom Milne and Jonathan Rosenbaum, included *Cockfighter* as one of their choices for the Top Ten films shown in Great Britain during 1974. When I saw *Cockfighter* listed there, together with *Amarcord* and *Scenes from a Marriage,* I went out into the night and drank without economy.

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PETER BISKIND

The Politics of Power in "On the Waterfront"

The Kazan revival has begun. Initiated in 1972 by the British journal *Movie*,[1] expedited in 1973 by Jim Kitses writing in *Cinema*,[2] and further assisted by the recent publication of a book-length interview edited by Michel Ciment of *Positif*,[3] it promises a long overdue reassessment of an unjustly neglected director. Whatever one's attitude towards either Kazan's political behavior in the fifties, or to the politics embedded in his films, it can no longer be denied that he is an important figure. He directed a half dozen major films of the fifties, and the Actors Studio, which he founded, left an indelible stamp on American screen acting. Marlon Brando, Lee Remick, James Dean, Julie Harris, Montgomery Clift, Shelley Winters, Paul Newman, Kim Hunter, Lee J. Cobb, Karl Malden, Rod Steiger, and many, many others cannot be understood apart from its influence.

Focussing on Kazan's work makes it no longer possible to evade the central question of film and ideology that *auteurists* and the more sophisticated *auteur*-structuralists have thus far largely obscured or ignored. This is so because Kazan, more than most directors of the fifties, was overly concerned with political themes, while at the same time his own life was crucially affected by his appearance before the House Un-American Activities Committee as a "friendly witness" in 1952. It was just this proximity to the storm center of American culture in the fifties that made his reputation so vulnerable to changes in the political climate. Kazan, in a sense, has been doubly unlucky. After selling out his friends on the left and enthusiastically joining the fifties crusade against communism, he was cast out of the mainstream of American film history by *auteur* critics who, like himself, were cultural fellow-travelers of the post-war corporate consensus but who, even more than he, turned against the aesthetics of socialist realism. They disliked the residue of the thirties social seriousness still evident in his work. Even leftwing *auteurists* who have not hesitated to paint right-wing action directors like Fuller, Siegel, and Aldrick in various shades of red, have drawn back from Kazan.[4]

Despite the fact that Kazan's work as a whole is now being regarded with greater interest, it is his later, more "personal" films like *America, America* and *The Arrangement*, made outside his longtime collaboration with major writers, that are gaining ground over the films of the high fifties like *On the Waterfront*. In other words, the reassessment is proceeding along typically *auteurist* lines, putting a premium on the expression of personality.

The new stress on the later films (not unlike previous *auteurist* rescue operations on Ford's westerns and late Renoir) depends on a confusion between personal and private, itself a product of the fifties attempt to cauterize ideology and valorize private life. The notion that *The Arrangement* is a more personal film than *On the Waterfront* is certainly an odd one. It would be hard to think of a film that more suggests an autobiographical reading than *On the Waterfront* which, after all, concerns informing, an issue which in reality marked Kazan's own life profoundly. Distinguishing early and late Kazan in this way can only proceed from a position like *auteurism* which seeks to expel politics from the area of legitimate artistic discourse with the aid of threadbare romantic notions of the artist, genius, personal vision, and so on.

Elia Kazan demonstrating a scene to Kirk Douglas in THE ARRANGEMENT.

Kazan, of course, was engaged in precisely the same effort. *On the Waterfront* is one of the earliest and most effective attempts to suppress politics with morality and private values that the fifties produced. It takes an important first step in detaching the self from a larger social context so that the idea of self can be redefined in narrower, safer terms. *Spendor in the Grass, America, America,* and *The Arrangement* merely develop the notion of personality initially presented in *On the Waterfront.*

The congruence between the ideological projects of Kazan and *auteurism,* both firmly rooted in the necessities of the fifties consensus, suggest another reason for the critical antipathy towards Kazan. It is not that Kazan was too much a product of the thirties for fifties *auteurists,* too unlike them in political stance and emotional tone, but rather the opposite. He was too much *like* them. Kazan's were *les mains sales* which executed the deeds at which their eyes dared not look. His films performed the ideological dirty work of the fifties and thus had to be rejected in favor of the films of a director like Nicholas Ray, where the same process is not so embarrassingly obvious. But Kazan and Ray are two sides of the same coin. Kazan screwed others, and is therefore bad; Ray screwed himself, and is therefore good. His films have an overlay of romantic pessimism which allows liberals to weep away their bad conscience.

In the seventies, Kazan has received the benefit of an altered cultural climate. He has profited by a new catholicity on the part of *auteur* critics whose major battles seem won and who are now casting about to find new tenants for the Pantheon, and by the interest of European left and American New Left critics who find in Kazan's cold war anti-Stalinism a confirmation of their own antipathy towards the old left.

Times do change, and each generation sees the film classics with its own eyes. Wounds heal, memory falters, present needs require of the past different lessons from those drawn by our predecessors. One would not wish to deny Kazan the consolations of history. Yet the social situations within which films are made continue to live, in turn, within them. Films like *Viva Zapata!* and *On the Waterfront* bear the marks, the *inscription,* as the French would say, of their historical context. They cannot be fully understood outside the passionate political controversies of which they were part. This essay is an attempt to make this inscription clear. It is intended as a contribution to the reassessment of Kazan and, beyond that, a contribution to the larger question of how Hollywood films respond to the requirements of the ideological context in which they are situated. Implicit in its approach is a critique of *auteurism.* While it cannot be denied that Kazan is an *auteur,* at the same time, like any other director, he must be seen as mediating conflicting cultural and aesthetic demands. Examining the cultural soil from which films grow does not impoverish them, as conservative critics often charge, but rather enriches them by restoring to them their original nourishment.

On the Waterfront falls in the middle of the seismic shift from the thirties to the fifties. By the time it was begun, in 1954, Kazan had long since abandoned the passionate commitment of the thirties. On the other hand, he had not yet attained the Fordian distance revealed in later films like *Baby Doll* (1956), *Wild River* (1960), and *Splendor in the Grass* (1961). *On the Waterfront* harnesses the methods of the thirties to the ideology of the fifties. It is political allegory cast in the form of a morality play. This requires a

particularly skillful form of aesthetic footwork, since its success requires that the political allegory be simultaneously admitted and refused. To deny the allegorical level runs the risk that the message of the film will go unrecorded. To acknowledge the allegorical level runs the risk that the ideological project of the film will be unmasked. Films like *On the Waterfront* walk a tightrope between revelation and concealment, between clarity and mystification.

In *Viva Zapata!* (1952), the first part of Kazan's anticommunist trilogy, he had shown that the exercise of individual power is either perverse or tragic. Zapata had to renounce state power to avoid being corrupted by it, but even so he found that the requirements of leadership poisoned his relations with his wife, indirectly led to his brother's death, and forced him to execute a trusted lieutenant. The exercise of power, in other words, entails the violation of the intimate personal bonds which we hold most dear. Although the commonplace that power corrupts is a staple of Hollywood political wisdom, finding classic expression in the comedies of Frank Capra, in the fifties, and especially in the hands of Kazan, it became a weapon in the cold war struggle against the left in general, and Stalinism in particular. According to sociologists like Daniel Bell, it was the millenial, ideological movements, the Nazis and the Soviets, who exercised power; democrats did not. Liberal democracy was regarded as an ideal form of government because everybody and nobody exercises power. In America, remarks one of Zapata's band, "the government governs, but with the consent of the people. The people have a voice." In *On the Waterfront,* two years later, we see how power manifests itself in a democracy.

Where *Viva Zapata!* has aged quickly, *On the Waterfront* remains, after two decades, a tremendously powerful film, one of the best films of the fifties. In many ways, it was a child of the *HUAC* investigations, a blow struck in the ideological and artistic battle between those who talked and those who didn't. Many of its personnel, including Kazan, Budd Schulberg who wrote the script, Lee J. Cobb who played John Friendly, and Leif Erickson who played one of the Waterfront Crime Commission investigators, had gone

Marlon Brando in VIVA ZAPATA!

before *HUAC,* confessed their past sins, and implicated close friends and associates. One of Kazan's closest friends (whom he did not name) was Arthur Miller with whom he had worked on *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman.* In 1953, Miller's play *The Crucible,* a thinly veiled attack on the witch hunt, opened on Broadway. In it, Miller has his central character go to his death rather than inform against his friends. Asked for names, he replies: "I speak my own sins; I cannot judge another. I have no tongue for it . . . I have three children—how may I teach them to walk like men in the world, and I sold my friends."[5]

On the Waterfront is Kazan's answer. It presents a situation in which informing on criminal associates is the only honorable course of action for a just man. The injunction against informing on friends and colleagues is axiomatic in most socieites where the state does not exercise overwhelming moral authority, but the film's dialogue repeatedly defines squealing not as an absolute but a relative matter. It depends on where you stand. Father Barry (Karl Malden) expresses this nicely: "What's ratting on them, is telling the truth for you." On the other hand, Charlie-the-Gent ("a butcher in a camel's hair coat") becomes the spokesman for the discredited principle of loyalty: "Stooling is when you rat on your friends."

By ratting on John Friendly and his boys, Terry Malloy (Marlon Brando) helps the Crime Commission destroy a corrupt union, wins the lady, Edie Doyle (Eva Marie Saint), and redeems himself in his own eyes and in those of the honest rank and file. He is the informer as hero.[6] Thus American

society may not be perfect, its institutions may be fallible, but they contain the mechanisms for their own regeneration. Although corrupt unions run the docks, the regulatory and investigatory (*HUAC* included?) agencies of government—the open hearings covered by the free press, the benign investigators—are more than a match for the forces of darkness. Justice prevails. As the opening title says: "It has always been in the American tradition not to hide our shortcomings, but on the contrary, to spotlight them and to correct them. The incidents portrayed in this picture were true of a particular area of the waterfront. They exemplify the way self-appointed tyrants can be fought and defeated by right-thinking men in a vital democracy."

This optimism regarding the democratic process is not so much a betrayal of the thirties, but a fulfillment of certain attitudes towards the state implicit in thirties radicalism. Both the New Deal with its stress on activist big government, and the Communist Party with its admiration for the Soviet Union, contributed to a generally positive attitude towards state power on the part of the left. A 1938 film, *Racket Busters,* scripted by Robert Rossen who himself later informed before *HUAC,* applauds state coercion of reluctant witnesses. A Popular Front film like *Native Land* also portrays the state as an effective instrument of the people. If the state was indeed as benevolent as these films would have it, it is perhaps not so surprising that the state could later, under different circumstances, command the loyalty of its citizens against its enemies. The ex-Communist friendly witnesses of the fifties were still Stalinists at heart, only Truman and Eisenhower had become their Stalin. The *USA* had replaced the *USSR.*

The submerged analogy between the criminally corrupt waterfront unions and the "crime" of membership in the Communist Party reflected a belief dear to the hearts of cold war liberals—that the *CPUSA* was a criminal conspiracy falling outside the traditional guarantees of civil liberties. As Sidney Hook put it, "heresy, yes, conspiracy, no." The inadequacy of this model, obvious at the time and certainly obvious now, does not need extended discussion. Suffice to say, the equation between overt acts of violence and "crimes" of belief that is used to justify informing against Communists and fellow travelers, doesn't hold up. As Murray Kempton pointed out in 1963, "Our laws deal with what a man has done, not what he might have done given the chance."[7]

Nor is the film's portrayal of union corruption very convincing. Although it is quite faithful to the texture of eastcoast waterfront life, it falsifies the overall picture. Just as Kazan conveniently overlooks the larger social and political implications of the class structure of Mexico in *Viva Zapata!,* attributing the dependent position of the dispossessed peasants solely to the venal generals and politicians, so here he is careful to circumscribe the tumor of corruption so that it may be neatly excised without undue injury or embarrassment to the body politic.[8] Despite one rhetorical gesture towards generality (a single shot shows "Mr. Upstairs" watching the Crime Commission hearings on television), Kazan emphasizes the limited and exceptional nature of his subject. He even goes so far as to have one of his dockers exclaim: "The waterfront . . . ain't part of America."

If, as Daniel Bell, Seymour Martin Lipset, and their followers maintained, the problems of the fifties were those of "piecemeal technology," amenable to technological solutions applied by an elite of experts, connections between the particular and the general which might suggest structural contradictions in society had to be suppressed.[9] The notion that racketeering might be endemic rather than incidental, that it was a natural expression of a capitalist system that concentrated power and money in the hands of a few and employed graft to lubricate and stabilize the system, was unthinkable. Corruption was exclusively regarded as a moral evil, a sin perpetrated by bad men (the theological frame of reference is enforced by the prominent place occupied by the priest Father Barry), rather than a form of mutually beneficial and politically expedient collusion between unions, management, and the Tammany Hall machine. Joseph P. Ryan, the International Longshoreman's Association (*ILA*) boss who could have served as a model for John Friendly, held notorious annual dinners, attendance at which was obligatory for every politician in

the city, the mayor and police commissioner included.[10] Management purchased "protection" from the crooked union, freedom from strikes and disruptions over pay and workplace grievances: "Industrial racketeering . . . performs the function . . . of stabilizing a chaotic market and establishing an order and structure in the industry."[11] Yet *On the Waterfront* portrays the shipper, a major beneficiary of this arrangement, as neutral, as a bystander above the factional fight within the union. He doesn't care who runs the docks, so long as he gets his ships loaded and unloaded.

We can now turn to the critical question of the film's conception of power. What immediately becomes clear is that the film doesn't seem to deal with power at all. The arena of conflict in *On the Waterfront* which is, after all, a film about labor and unions, is not class but self. It is not without but within. It is Terry Malloy's interior struggle, his struggle to come to moral awareness and to act on his new perception of right and wrong.

The agent of Terry's awakening is the waterfront priest, Father Barry. Father Barry intervenes decisively at crucial moments to change the course of events: he precipitates the struggle against the mob, he persuades Terry Malloy to confess to Edie Doyle that he helped set up her brother Joey to be pushed off a roof, he prevents Terry from using his gun to avenge the death of his brother at the hands of John Friendly, he urges Terry to testify before the Crime Commission, and he prevents the dockers from aiding the badly injured Malloy so that he can make his heroic walk leading the men back to work in defiance of the mob. Kazan apparently approves of this kind of moral agency, since all these interventions turn out for the best, but they could have easily been catastrophic. What emerges is an alarming picture of a ruthless crusader who manipulates others like chess pieces in the name of a higher good for which no price is too high, no sacrifice too great.

That manipulation is not too strong a word for Father Barry's behavior is clear from the authority with which he employs his carrot-and-stick strategy to guide Terry through the intricate moral maze that Kazan has constructed for him. Although his interventions in the course of the action are frequently direct and forceful (at one point he knocks Terry down in order to prevent him from going gunning for Friendly), just as frequently this coercion is coyly denied or disguised. On the several occasions when Terry asks Father Barry or Edie (an ancillary manipulator) what course of action he should adopt, they insist that it is up to him, to his conscience, that they cannot tell him what to do. Invariably, this disavowal is contradicted by a moral imperative which immediately follows: do this or do that, as in this exchange in which Father Barry forcefully but obliquely urges Terry to reveal his part in Joey's death to Edie:

FATHER BARRY: What are you gonna do about it? . . . about telling her, the Commission, the subpoena? . . .
TERRY: I don't know . . .
FATHER BARRY: Listen, if I were you I would walk right — never mind, I'm not asking you to do anything . . . It's your own conscience that's gotta do the askin' — Edie's . . . coming here. . . . Come on, why don't you tell her.

Father Barry's method of persuasion is successful. Terry indeed perceives his choices as issuing from his own "conscience," his own deepest desires, when in fact they are elicited by a powerful, albeit disguised, form of psychological and moral pressure. It appears, in fact, that Charlie-the-Gent is correct when he tells John Friendly later that "This girl and the Father—they got the hooks in the kid so deep he don't know which end is up anymore."

Father Barry is doing no more than applying manipulative methods of social control which have deep roots in the American past, in the Progressive movement in general and in the philosophy of John Dewey in particular. Dewey's stress on social control and collectivism had a radical ring in the thirties, when it was intended as a counterweight to the chaotic conditions created by what seemed like an uncontrolled, irrational capitalist economy, but by the fifties Dewey's methods had become useful tools for constructing the new consensus. Christopher Lasch, in *The Agony of the American Left*, identifies the role of this manipulative liberal ideology in easing social conflict: "Even when it

originated in humanitarian impulses, progressive ideas led not to a philosophy of liberation but to a blueprint for control. The task of the social reformer came to be seen as that of 'enlisting the person's own participating disposition in getting the result desired, and thereby developing within him an intrinsic and persisting direction in the right way." ' (Quoted from John Dewey, *Democracy and Education,* N.Y., 1961, 26-7.)[12]

In choosing to use persuasion rather than coercion, Barry is doing no more than acting in accord with the democratic ethos as defined, for example, by Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. in 1949: "The thrust of the democratic faith is away from fanaticism; it is towards compromise, persuasion, and consent in politics . . . "[13] Force was not used because it was not needed. As Schlesinger pointed out in the course of arguing against some of the harsher measures of the witchhunt: "If we can defeat Communism as a political force within the framework of civil liberties, why abandon that framework?" Using the Church as a disguised instrument of social control, as Kazan does, was characteristic of the disingenuous approach of one strain of fifties liberalism towards problems of power. Reactionaries like Leo McCarey were a good deal more forthright. A film like *My Son John* clearly identifies the *FBI* as the locus of moral authority and power. The priest, in comparison, is a severely diminished figure.[14]

What is the significance of a ruthless and powerful but apparently moral figure like Father Barry when Kazan had shown us in *Viva Zapata!* that power corrupts? Although the power-to-the-people moral of *Viva Zapata!* would lead us to expect that in a democracy, where power is shared among the demos (In America, "the people have a voice"), such a figure should be either evil or unnecessary. But in *On the Waterfront* the people are incapable of exercising power. They are a passive herd who invariably fail to act when put to the test. At best, they can follow the leader, or exercise their power in a negative refusal to act: "How 'bout Terry? He don't work, we don't work." The conclusion which inescapably emerges from the contradiction between the two films, is that when Kazan wishes to show the self-regenerative capacities of liberal capitalist society, through mass political action, effective yet circumscribed, leaders are *OK*. But when he is faced with a real social upheaval, as he is in *Viva Zapata!*, which threatens to exceed the bounds of decorous reform, he enforces a self-serving moral that leadership will always become corrupt.

Rather than the egalitarian society we might have expected after *Viva Zapata!, On the Waterfront,* like many other films of the fifties, offers an elitist model of society in which power is the prerogative of experts in the law and its enforcement (police, judges, lawyers) in alliance with social engineers (priests, psychiatrists, social workers) and family (usually the hero's wife or girlfriend) to perform an essential task of social control. Acting in concert, the official and unofficial agents of society curb the hero's cynical, self-interested asocial behavior by awakening in him, at the very most, a higher moral awareness (as in *On the Waterfront*) or, at the very least, a recognition that his own self-interest coincides with the larger purposes of the state (as in the films of Samuel Fuller). The control exercised by these figures is indirect rather than direct, manipulative rather than coercive. The hero perceives his commitment to family and a steady job, and his consequent acknowledgment of the legitimacy of the established order is a voluntary choice. Social directives are internalized. But Terry is in no sense free; he has merely exchanged one type of bondage for another. Authoritarian coercion exercised by the mob (he had to take a fall in a fixed fight) gives way to authoritarian manipulation exercised by the society.

Even though Terry rises bravely on his own two feet at the end, having successfully beaten Friendly in hand-to-hand combat, inspiring the men to defy the mob, his stance is an uncertain one; we have the feeling that Terry is still at the mercy of forces he cannot understand, forces much more subtle and dangerous than the ones he has overcome—an alliance of Wilsonian moral ferocity, Progressive institutions, the family, and management. As the film closes, and the great iron door of the shed crashes shut, we feel that Malloy is not so much liberated as trapped by the shadowy figure of the shipping boss who is the ultimate beneficiary of the action, and who has (almost) the last word:

"All right, let's get to work." Once power abused (again, as in *Viva Zapata!*, concentrated in the hands of one man) has been eliminated, the ships can be loaded, and the happy collaboration between capital and labor that cemented the fifties consensus can prevail.

Kazan's view of reform is as elitist as his conception of democracy. Both social reform and individual salvation are top-down affairs, conducted by experts, the Crime Commission in the one case, and the priest in the other. The initiative in both instances comes from the experts, from above. This becomes clear if we look at a similar situation in Fuller's *Underworld USA*, a much more populist film: in the alliance between the Special Prosecutor and Tolly Devlin against the syndicate, the initiative comes from Tolly, from below.

Experts were seen by many political commentators in the fifties as the logical agents for social change. As Arthur Schlesinger wrote: "The experience of a century has shown that neither the capitalists nor the workers are so tough and purposeful as Marx anticipated: that their mutual bewilderment and inertia leave the way open for some other group to serve as the instrument of change; that when the politician-manager-intellectual type is intelligent and decisive, he can usually get society to move fast enough to escape breaking up under the weight of its own contradictions."[15]

A liberal science fiction film like Robert Wise's *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951) envisioned scientists and intellectuals alone as receptive to the message of peace on earth delivered by the interplanetary emissary Klaatu. The average man on the street was fearful, suspicious, or narrowly self-interested, like Patricia Neal's boyfriend, an insurance salesman. Confidently basing their analysis on a "post" - Marxist perspective which relegated class conflict to the dustbin of history, liberals like Kazan and Schlesinger could imagine evolutionary social change engineered by neutral managers without class affiliation on behalf of a state apparatus which was itself above class.

Although it is true that Kazan is ambivalent toward intellectuals his "bad ones" are ineffectual; they cannot get the job done.

Even though the main thrust of *On the Waterfront* is towards the socialization of Terry, it is necessary to pay close attention to the way this operation is carried out. It occurs through an apparently contradictory process of individuation. Terry is divested of old-world ethnic ties to immediate family ("they're asking me to put the finger on my own brother"), to the extended family of the union local ("Uncle" Johnny Friendly "used to take me to the ball games when I was a kid"), and to neighborhood. He is systematically detached from the social tissue that forms his natural habitat, and gathered into a larger notion of community-as-nation, associated with ahistorical absolutes like "democracy," "truth," "right and wrong," and anchored in the upwardly mobile nuclear family which provides its institutional base. For his blood brother Charlie he substitutes the claims of the Christian brotherhood of Father Barry ("you've got some other brothers") and the democratic brotherhood of America ("the people have a right to know.").

This transition is facilitated in several ways. First, it is rendered as a process of growth. Terry's testimony before the Crime Commission is an indication of self-knowledge ("I was ratting on myself all them years, and I didn't even know it") and the assumption of adulthood. The measure of his maturity is his decision to inform, to transcend local loyalties for larger and presumably higher ones. Loyalty to friends is regarded as an adolescent virtue, the province of his protege Tommy of the Golden Warriors who spurns him after he testifies. Although Tommy's reaction is experienced as a painful repudiation, it is somewhat undermined by being given a Freudian dimension. The sullen and hostile attitude he displays towards Edie earlier in the film suggests adolescent jealousy of the as yet latent adult relationship between Edie and Terry. Second, the mob, although in one sense Terry's family, is in another sense a false family. After all, it is an all-male group like the Golden Warriors, and it frequently acts to destroy family ties. It is responsible for Joey Doyle's death (Joey is defined in the film principally as Edie's brother); the core of Terry's

accusation against his brother Charlie is that Charlie let his loyalty to Friendly take priority over his natural blood ties to his own brother. (Charlie later redeems himself by reasserting familial bonds in defiance of the mob.) Since the mob is exposed as a false family, it is not too difficult to convince Terry that they do not deserve his allegiance. Third, Terry's private goals, like his boxing career that the mob had frustrated, are legitimized. And, finally, all these strands are gathered up in the nuclear family represented by Edie. It offers maturity and responsibility, adult sexuality, upward mobility (Edie has been educated in a suburb, Tarrytown, and her father has labored so that she will enjoy the advantages of which he was deprived), and satisfaction of "private" goals. If his boxing career is over, he can at least experience the pleasures of romantic love, the peculiar province and strength of the nuclear family in a society where emotional gratification can not be found outside the home. In terms of social control, society has successfully identified the "responsible" leadership (the family) within the community, and forged an alliance with it in order to destroy autonomous (and thus subversive) groups outside its control.

Submerged in the valorization of romantic love, family, and "feminine" virtues is a new definition of what it meant to be a man in fifties America. The old-style immigrant morality of John Friendly, and the character structure that accompanied it, were obsolete. The ethnic ghettoes were being dispersed by assimilation and upward mobility; the protective reflexes based on fierce individual and ethnic loyalties were no longer necessary. New access to economic opportunity and suburban lifestyles, along with constitutional guarantees like due process and habeas corpus, afforded first-generation Americans all the protection formerly provided by ethnic protective associations, ethnic enclaves within unions, and tight, close-knit neighborhoods. Changed social circumstances required a new, softer, more pliable and trusting version of the male role. And if Terry had to move towards Edie, Edie had to move towards him, away from old-fashioned European notions of woman's role pressed upon her by her father, towards a superficially more equal and activist stance. It is a comment on the distance between the fifties and the seventies that the immigrant ethos which is discarded in *On the Waterfront* as "un-American," is sentimentalized by a more radical film like *Godfather I,* with Brando now playing what could easily be the aging John Friendly.

Brando and Eva Marie Saint: legitimizing of private goals.

In the fifties, the process by which Terry is detached from his old loyalties and incorporated into an abstract community was called "massification" by social critics when it occurred in totalitarian societies. It signified the emergence of "mass" man. Groups which mediated between the individual and the state, which might have competed with the state for the loyalty of the individual, were destroyed. By means of mass culture (TV, the press, and the movies), schooling, and work, all of which reproduced prescriptive hierarchial relationships, the state directly impinged upon the individual. The only institution which remained intact was the nuclear family. Although it was the locus of a less authoritarian set of habits than those instilled by school and factory, it was expected to generate goals of personal gratification through consumerism and emotional relationships which in turn were to motivate and guarantee the dichotomy between public life and private life.

It is worth noting that in the course of Terry's pilgrimage, he and Edie, who is initially a spokeswoman for the right-at-any-cost position of Father Barry, change places. As soon as she falls in love with Terry, she urges him to flee, to avoid the confrontation with Friendly that Father Barry

demands, and for which he is ready to sacrifice Terry, Edie, and everyone else. It's just not worth it, she feels. Although the film fails to give credence to her point of view, she comes to represent a perspective from which to challenge Barry's manipulative morality. Within the limited terms that the film presents, it is not worth it. In the absence of a more profound insight into the politics of corruption, Malloy is being asked to sacrifice himself for nothing. As Pauline Kael pointed out at the time, John Dwyer, one of the real-life prototypes of Terry Malloy, defied the *ILA* but lost the support of *AFL* officials who abandoned him in the crunch. His attempts to challenge the *ILA* ended in failure; in fact the *ILA* gained even tighter control of the waterfront through a union shop. "For a happy ending," Kael wryly quoted *Time,* "dockers could go to the movies."

Although, as we have seen, Kazan falsifies the larger picture in the interests of his own political position, it is important to come to terms with the reasons the film works as well as it does. Part of the answer to this question lies in the kind of world Kazan presents. Nicholas Ray, close to Kazan in many respects, offers a Rousseauist vision; his heroes are sentimentalized innocents, noble savages inhabiting a benevolent natural world. They are presumably destroyed by the corrupt institutions of the civilized society, but since Ray's films are without a dimension of significant social criticism, they fail to dramatize this process. His films consequently lack a sense of real conflict, and issue, all too often, in saccharine happy endings in which previously antagonistic characters kiss and make up. Kazan's world, on the other hand, is entirely different. The state of nature is not innocent, but a Hobbesian jungle. As Terry tells Edie: "You know this city's full of hawks . . . they hang around on top of the big hotels and they spot a pigeon in the park—right down on them." This predatory morality informs the ethics of the mob, and makes strong claims on Terry as well. "Down here, it's every man for himself. Do you wanna hear my philosophy of life? Do it to him before he does it to you," Terry tells Edie. Opposed to this philosophy in which the strong (hawks) consume the weak (the pigeons) is Edie's morality ("Isn't everyone part of everybody else?") and Father Barry's Christianity which promises that the meek shall inherit the earth. The battleground on which these two conceptions of man's fate contend is American democracy, and when Terry decides to become a stool pigoen, he fuses the spiritual and secular realms. Terry's protege Tommy calls attention to this as he throws a dead pigeon at Terry's feet: "A pigeon for a pigeon." In Christian terms, Terry voluntarily assumes the role of the meek (the dove); in secular terms, he assumes the role of the stool pigeon (the informer), and the one transfigures the other. The political informer as Christian saint.

Terry is well on his way to crucifixion before he testifies. He puts his hand through a plate-glass window (stigmata), and later when his friends avoid him after his testimony, he experiences the abandonment of Christ on the Cross. More important for the theme of power is the subsequent beating Terry undergoes at the hands of John Friendly and company. If power in the hands of one man is always abused, as Kazan emphasized in *Viva Zapata!* and reminded us again in *On the Waterfront* (Friendly), it has to be disguised (Father Barry) or, as manifest in a character like Terry Malloy, a potentially more explosive figure than Barry, must be domesticated. Marlon Brando was the ideal vehicle for the theme of power in the fifties. As the quintessential expression of the brooding, inarticulate, violent lumpen or laborer,

Brando about to be horsewhipped (by Karl Malden!) in ONE-EYED JACKS—a film he himself directed.

his menacing strength with its lower class overtones had to be transformed into negative power, the capacity to endure the aggressions inflicted upon him by others. Thus the beating or humiliation became an essential part of the Brando character, occurring not only in *Viva Zapata!* and *On the Waterfront,* but in such diverse films as *The Wild One, One-Eyed Jacks, The Chase,* and *The Appaloosa.* The significance of Terry's final walk down the pier to the shed is that his power has been chastened, transfigured and spiritualized into the endurance of the martyr.

In a democracy, then, power is not confronted with power, but with Christian virtue. Liberal institutions (the Crime Commission) hand in hand with the Christian soldier (Terry) will insure the reign of the meek. Like Leo McCarey and other anti-Communist directors of the period, Kazan not only made the implicit claim that those who named names before *HUAC* were Christian saints, but that fifties America was the secular City of God on earth. A booming consumer economy offered ample proof that the God who had abandoned twentieth-century Europe to physical and spiritual destruction had come to roost in America. Father Barry's assertion that "Christ is down here, on the waterfront" is not a metaphorical or rhetorical device, but literal truth, expressing a world view peculiar to the fifties. I know nothing about Kazan's religious convictions, but *On the Waterfront* suggests that he shared with most Americans a belief in a providence that had saved America from the ravages of war, had given her the atomic bomb, and had delivered into her reluctant hands the responsibility for world leadership. This belief in the special destiny of America was responsible in part for the suppression of transcendence (or "negation," in Marcuse's sense) in films of the fifties, either the ridiculing of utopianism as childish or unrealistic, or the attempt to show that utopian aspirations could be realized within American institutions. Thus the incarnation of the Christian (and transcendent) dove in the secular (and political) role of the stool pigeon.

Not only does the physical world incarnate spirit, but it is transformed and redeemed by spirit. The extraordinary scene between Charlie and Terry in the back of the car is an example of this process. Its effectiveness in part derives from the tension between the confined space and the potentially explosive nature of the interchange between the two men. A shallow and constricting physical space is converted into a deep spiritual space through a series of recognitions which clarify and transform their relationship, finally freeing Terry from the lies and bad faith that had clouded his relationship with his brother and himself. In the same way, physical falling is transformed into spiritual resurrection. Joey must fall from the roof so that Terry may rise; Father Barry must descend into the hold of the ship where Dugan lies dead before he can rise with the body, hoisted aloft in the sling.

Although the physical world is violent and menacing, like the fiercely percussive sound track that deafens Edie as she listens to Terry's confession, it is the presence of spirit that facilitates the creation of a moral geography which makes the physical world an expression, almost an allegory of spirit. The moral isolation of the neighborhood is enforced by an iron picket fence which separates it from the river and the New York skyline beyond. Terry's confession to Edie appropriately takes place outside the fence. This exposed ground becomes an index of the extent to which his relationship with Edie draws Terry away from safe rationalizations and familiar relationships towards the shadowy world on the other side of the river. The fog which perpetually shrouds the park in front of the church must be seen as an emblem of Terry's confusion, while the camera movements and shot compositions insistently reinforce the vertical orientation of the film, itself the physical analogue to the verbal play on falling and rising, going down and coming up, and an iteration in physical terms of the theological framework of fall and resurrection. One example of this is the scene of Dugan's death, where the characters are inversely arranged on a vertical axis according to their moral positions, an arrangement which at the same time directly reflects their secular power: Friendly at the top, Father Barry at the bottom, and Terry in between. By the end of the film, this layering has been reversed, and we take leave of a Friendly (who has just emerged from a pre-

cipitous descent into the water) diminished by an overhead crane shot.

Despite the redemptive immanence of spirit in the physical world, Kazan's vision, unlike Nicholas Ray's, includes real conflict. Terry's cynicism about the promises of democracy expresses a real contradiction within postwar America, one that eventually generated the opposite of fifties consensus: the radicalism of the sixties. Despite Kazan's efforts to the contrary, the line from Brando's Terry Malloy and Emiliano Zapata to the sixties is a direct one, indicated by the sympathy with which young New Leftists viewed Kazan's anti-Communism. That *On the Waterfront* finally produced its mirror image in *Godfather I* suggests that American popular culture is indeed dialectical in nature, contrary to the views of critics like Noel Burch who practice a mechanistic and undialectical Marxism which barely disguises their essential formalism.[16]

The seriousness of the contradiction Terry reflects is suggested by the fact that his socialization and redemption require real effort; the most sophisticated resources of Church and State must be brought to bear upon him. And this is not only because Kazan's vision includes a world of darkness, but because he gives this negation free expression. Despite the final harmonization of conflicting interests, the dissident voices are not hushed. Edie's anguished cries of protest are heard above Father Barry's efforts to propel Terry on his final walk. She is still opposed to his manipulation even this close to the end of the film. Likewise, the scene of the dead pigeons is extremely effective, and its power is not entirely dispelled by its Christ-abandoned overtones. There is real loss in this world, and its complexity is reflected in the richness of characterization and acting. Even John Friendly is sympathetic, as Cobb's villains usually are, through the tremendous impact of his screen presence. He usually overwhelms everyone else in his films; if he doesn't here, it is a tribute to the brilliance of Brando's performance, probably the finest of his career. Finally, the film succeeds because of the immensely powerful grip on the American psyche exercised by the myth of individual action and redemption which lies at its heart. Especially as embodied by Brando, this myth allows us to express the fantasy of antisocial rebellion at the same time that it allows us to submerge it in an even more compelling vision of social inclusion, wholeness, and renewal.

One is tempted by a Satanist reading of *On the Waterfront,* always the last resort of the hard-pressed Marxist critic faced with the excellence of reactionary art. Pauline Kael (no Marxist) has argued that "it is not Terry as a candidate for redemption who excites (the audience), but Terry the tough . . . Terry is credible until he becomes a social hero."[17] Much as I would like to agree with her, I can't. Terry is credible to the end. However deluded, he has paid his dues; he has earned his victory. By the time he staggers to the shed, we no longer care whether Kazan has falsified the power relations in fifties America or not. There is a fitness, a completeness to the film which defies criticism.[18] Meretricious as Kazan's politics are, they are deeply felt, and in some sense true to the experience of significant groups of people in the early fifties.[19]

Finally, some conclusions. Kazan twists and turns to avoid confronting the implications of American power and power in America. He presents a picture of an ideal democratic society in which power, as such, does not exist. It is only the enemy which exercises (and abuses) power, the John Friendlies of the world. Nevertheless, since power is in fact exercised by agents with whom Kazan is sympathetic, it must be disguised in order to maintain the fiction of its absence. Power struggles in the public sphere are displaced into moral struggles in the private sphere. Manipulation replaces coercion, and power, to the extent that it cannot be denied, is transformed into the negative power of the martyr.

This is the portrait of America that the film intends to present. But the picture of America that actually emerges from the film is quite different. Power, rather than being dispersed throughout the whole society, is concentrated in the hands of an elite of experts, both official and unofficial, who wield it with a ruthless singleness of purpose for their own ends. These ends include the socialization, if possible, of dissident individuals and

groups or, if necessary, their destruction. Socialization is achieved by redefining individual allegiances and goals so that they conform to those sanctioned by society.

The two antagonistic portraits of America (egalitarian and elitist) offered by *On the Waterfront* are not entirely contradictory. A view of society as run by technical elites is one way of achieving the masking of power required by the egalitarian fiction. The state is viewed as a politically neutral organization of administrators standing above the petty quarrels of competing interest groups, a servant of the people.

The reasons for the felt necessity to disguise and deny the realities of power in America are not entirely clear, but they do invite speculation. Attitudes towards power distinguished and divided the various political factions during the postwar period. The older, liberal anti-Communists who came of age in the thirties felt uneasy about power. They associated it with the abuses of Stalinism. The new breed of cold-war liberals who came of age in the forties, on whom the experience of exercise of just power in World War II had a profound effect, felt it necessary to come to terms with power. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., in his attempt to carve out a "vital center," a hard-headed "democratic left," denounced totalitarian communists on the one hand, and scolded soft-hearted progressives on the other for their common failure to employ power effectively. The Stalinists used their power not for the general good, but to create a monolithic totalitarian state which served the interests of a new class of bureaucrats and state managers. Progressives, on the other hand, were afraid of power. Politics for them became merely the self-indulgence of private neuroses and guilts. The denizens of Schlesinger's vital center, on the other hand, were able to make a realistic appraisal of the potentials and limits of power. Unlike the progressives, they were not afraid to use it. Unlike the Stalinists, their power was "accountable" or "responsible" power, limited by the restraints inherent in the democractic system. For Schlesinger, as for most liberal intellectuals of the postwar period, the defining characteristic of a democracy such as America was that it was "pluralistic," that is, power was shared by a large number of different interest groups who competed on a more or less equal basis for a part of the pie. Social critics like C. Wright Mills who questioned this model, who suggested that power in America was concentrated in the hands of a ruling elite, were dismissed as cranks, communists, or both.

Kazan was considerably less frank than Schlesinger in his attitude towards power. Of an earlier generation than Schlesinger, a generation which had itself tasted the mixed fruits of CP politics, he revealed some of the special bitterness and engaged in much of the special pleading that characterized ex-Communists who collaborated in the cold-war witch-hunt. Schlesinger, after all, was somewhat nearer to the actual seat of power than was Kazan (by the time he wrote *The Vital Center* he had worked on the Marshall Plan as a special assistant to Averell Harriman); he was as much concerned with refurbishing liberalism for the purpose of providing a cloak of respectability for the new American hegemony, as he was with scarifying the USSR and the Stalinist left. While Kazan was satisfied to discredit the whole idea of political power and deny the existence of power in America, Schlesinger had, at the same time, to relegitimize power so that it could be used without scruple in the interests of America foreign policy. Kazan fought on one front, Schlesinger fought on two.

The reluctance to acknowledge or specify centers of power at a time of vast American military and economic strength may also be taken as an indication of guilt or bad conscience, a refusal to accept responsibility for the uses to which American power had already been put, not only at home in the witch-hunt, but in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. As Michael Wood has pointed out, many American films of the fifties, like *The Gunfighter* (1950), express a wish to relinquish power. Nevertheless, it would be another decade or so before these contradictions would surface. In the meantime, Kazan's longshoremen learned their lessons well. Ten years later, they would be loading weapons for Vietnam and their sons would be going off to fight.

NOTES

1. *Movie,* 19, Winter 1971/72.
2. "Elia Kazan: A Structural Analysis," Jim Kitses, *Cinema* (USA), vol. 7, #3, 25-36.
3. *Kazan on Kazan,* ed., Michel Ciment, New York, 1974.
4. There is certainly precedent in Marxist criticism for championing an artist who on the face of it seems to be reactionary. Engels defended Balzac (see his letter to Margaret Harkness) and other critics, most notably Lukacs, have followed suit. Yet in the case of Hollywood directors of the fifties, this claim seems to me highly dubious.
5. *The Crucible,* Arthur Miller (New York, 1971). It is interesting to note that Kazan could have worked with Miller on *On the Waterfront.* The idea, according to Miller, was originally his; he had done a considerable amount of work on a script before Schulberg came on the film. Schulberg's ultimate authorship of the shooting script represents, if nothing else, a symbolic shift to the right. Cf. "The Year It Came Apart," Arthur Miller, *New York Magazine,* Dec. 30, 1974/Jan. 6, 1975. Miller's account also throws light on the relationship between overt and covert anti-Communist films. *On the Waterfront* could have been made as an overtly anti-Communist film dealing with Party, not mob control of unions. In fact, it was only under these conditions that Harry Cohn would agree to produce the film. Kazan chose to remain faithful to his original conception and produce it independently. The film is still anti-Communist, but much more effective because it displaces and partially conceals its anti-Communism. Liberal anti-Communists like Dorothy Jones clearly saw the advantages of subtlety. She criticized Hollywood's anti-Communist productions for doing more harm than good in their vulgar lack of sophistication. (Cf. her "Communism and the Movies," in *Report on Blacklisting,* Fund for the Republic, 1956.) Liberal critics often point to the poor box-office showings of anti-Communist films of the fifties to argue against the idea that Hollywood films are ideological. Hollywood's infrequent forays into politics, they say, have been disastrous. In fact, the evidence merely shows that Americans are allergic to overt propaganda. Covert propaganda, like *On the Waterfront,* does very well.
6. For a different perspective towards informing, note the treatment accorded stool pigeons in Jules Dassin's prison film *Brute Force,* just a few years earlier.
7. *America Comes of Middle Age* (New York, 1963).
8. Compare Kazan's sanguine treatment of corruption-as-tumor to Lang's pessimistic view in *The Big Heat* of corruption as a gradually spreading stain which eventually blackens almost the entire society.
9. In *The End of Ideology* (New York, 1961) Bell argued that New York waterfront racketeering not only took the shape it did as a result of the antiquated physical condition of the docks, but was in fact caused, in large measure, by the fact that the port facilities were inadequate to handle modern trucks. Dockside congestion gave rise to the occupation of "loading" (goods had to be picked up off the docks and loaded onto trucks) which came to be a major source of graft. The solution, in other words, was wider streets.
10. The intimate relationship between the mob, big labor, city officials, and business can be glimpsed from the following facts. "Since the port is a municipal enterprise, a businessman had to negotiate pier leases from the city, get various licenses, and learn his way around the Office of Marine and Aviation . . . in 1947, during the (Mayor) O'Dwyer regime, an ex-bootlegger who sought to rent a pier was told to see Clarence Neal, a power in Tammany Hall, and to engage his services for $100,000. As a result of these disclosures, Mr. O'Dwyer's Commissioner of Marine and Aviation and his two chief deputies retired . . . From 1928 to 1938, Joe Ryan was chairman of the AFL Central Trades and Labor Council, and in that post spoke for 'labor' in the political campaigns . . . Another hidden source of ILA influence was the . . . friendship between Joe Ryan and a prominent New York businessman . . . William J. McCormack. He was . . . executive vice-president of the powerful U.S. Trucking Corporation, whose board chairman was Alfred E. Smith . . . His Morania Oil Company supplies fuel oil to the city. His largest enterprise, Penn Stevedore Company, unloads all the freight brought into the city by the Pennsylvania Railroad . . . Jarka, a stevedoring concern, had paid $89,582 in 'petty cash' to steamship company officials over a five year period to earn 'good-will'; $20,000 had gone to Walter Wells, the president of Isthmian Lines (owned by U.S. Steel) . . ." (Bell, *op. cit.,* p. 176).
11. Bell, *op. cit.,* p. 176.
12. *The Agony of the American Left* (New York, 1969) pp. 9, 10.
13. All quotes here from *The Vital Center,* (London, 1970), pp. 245, 210, 218.
14. By way of contrast, compare the role of the priest in Hitchcock's *I Confess* (1952) with that in *My Son John* and *On the Waterfront.* As Leo Braudy has pointed out, the moral authority of the priest (Montgomery Clift) runs counter to the demands of the state voiced by the police inspector—played, curiously enough, by Karl Malden. Although the film eventually reconciles the claims of conscience with the demands of society, an authentic conservative like Hitchcock still comes off as a libertar-

ian in the fifties, while a liberal like Kazan comes off as a totalitarian.

15. Schlesinger, *op. cit.*, 155.

16. Cf. especially "Propositions," Noel Burch and Jorge Dana, *Afterimage*, #5, Spring 1974.

17. *I Lost It At The Movies*, (New York, 1966), p. 47.

18. Nevertheless, the ending has always been puzzling. Lindsay Anderson, writing a famous and controversial piece in 1955 in *Sight and Sound* (vol. 24, #3, 127-30), said: "It is a conclusion that can only be taken in two ways: as hopeless, savagely ironic; or as fundamentally contemptuous, pretending to idealism, but in reality without either grace, or joy, or love." Anderson called the film "fascist" because it implies the necessity of strong leadership over the rank and file who are portrayed as children. This is certainly an important element in the film, but to call it fascist obscures more than it reveals. The ideology of the film is precisely *not* fascist, if by that term we mean authoritarian; rather, it can best be described by Marcuse's notion of manipulative repressive tolerance. Raymond Durgnat in *Films and Feelings* (Cambridge, 1971), p. 74, disagrees with Anderson, citing Bell's article as a rebuttal, but without particularizing. I would say, if anything, Bell contradicts Kazan. On the one hand, he stresses much more rank-and-file militancy than Kazan portrays. The frequent and vigorous wildcat strikes of the late forties hardly bear out Kazan's picture of docile, sheeplike dockers. On the other hand, Bell speculates that there was not as much resistance to the ILA as these walkouts seemed to indicate (as suggested by the results of two NLRB elections won by the ILA), and that they were largely provoked by rival mobs on the outside seeking a piece of the action. If this is true, it contradicts Kazan's picture of reform issuing from an apocalyptic confrontation of good and evil. Kazan himself has some odd comments on the ending in the Ciment interview, while Kael simply considers the end ("the shipowner, an oddly ambiguous abstraction") not "thought out." I think this is closest to the truth.

19. One place the film does ring false is its portrait of the Crime Commission. Kazan is at pains to underscore the scrupulous solicitude with which witnesses were treated by the Crime Commission: "You have every right not to talk if that's what you choose to do"; "You can bring a lawyer if you wish; you're privileged under the Constitution to protect yourself against questions which might implicate you in any crime." This kind of special pleading is particularly offensive and hypocritical in view of the actual treatment accorded witnesses during this period; it is hardly the place of an informer like Kazan to recommend the virtue of prosecutors to defendants who were not so cooperative as he, and risked careers in the interest of principle.

I am indebted to Leo Braudy, Al LaValley, William Rothman, and Michael Wood for valuable suggestions which I have incorporated in this article.

MITCH TUCHMAN

New Documentaries at Filmex

Three dozen documentaries were screened at the Los Angeles International Film Exposition, Filmex, this year. There were documentaries on subjects sexual (*I Love His Legs*), political (*General Idi Amin Dada*, etc), sexual-political (*Woman to Woman*), technological (*Location North Sea* and *History of the Motor Car*), aesthetic (*Adventures in Perception* and *Background: Carmen D'Avino*), technological-sexual (*Tattoo*), aesthetic-technological (*Exploratorium* and *Christo's Valley Curtain*) and biographical (*Pirosmani* and *Old-Fashioned Woman*). Everything, in other words . . . except *cinéma vérité*.

If this exhibition of dozens of recent documentaries represented the state of the art, then *cinéma vérité* is gone. Perhaps after all it was a figment of the early sixties, because they were the post-Sputnik, science-euphoria years, and because they were the liberal years when fear of the Cold War was in abeyance, but radicalism had not yet swept the country. Photo-realism served both masters: for the (social) scientists it presented

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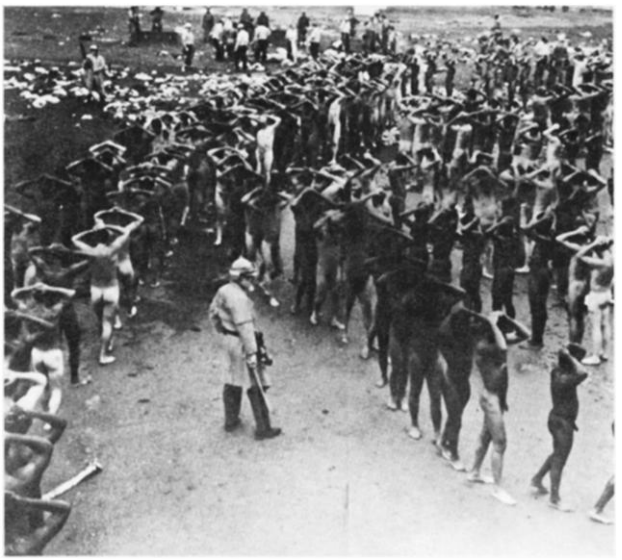
New Documentaries at Filmex

Three dozen documentaries were screened at the Los Angeles International Film Exposition, Filmex, this year. There were documentaries on subjects sexual (*I Love His Legs*), political (*General Idi Amin Dada*, etc), sexual-political (*Woman to Woman*), technological (*Location North Sea* and *History of the Motor Car*), aesthetic (*Adventures in Perception* and *Background: Carmen D'Avino*), technological-sexual (*Tattoo*), aesthetic-technological (*Exploratorium* and *Christo's Valley Curtain*) and biographical (*Pirosmani* and *Old-Fashioned Woman*). Everything, in other words . . . except *cinéma vérité*.

If this exhibition of dozens of recent documentaries represented the state of the art, then *cinéma vérité* is gone. Perhaps after all it was a figment of the early sixties, because they were the post-Sputnik, science-euphoria years, and because they were the liberal years when fear of the Cold War was in abeyance, but radicalism had not yet swept the country. Photo-realism served both masters: for the (social) scientists it presented

data, for the politicians reality itself was a protest—just the sight and sound of it.

Manipulation has reasserted itself from the most banal audience-knows-nothing pedantry (*Location North Sea* and *Piet Mondrian—A Film Essay*) to genuine attempts to have an audience deal with implicit associations among the data that touch their lives (*Introduction to the Enemy, Pascal,* and *The Vocation*) and everything in between (*Last Grave at Dimbaza* and *Attica*).



ATTICA, by Cinda Firestone

Cinda Firestone was not concentrating on her partner or the dance. Even while the hired help shot a little craps out in the ktichen, she was deciding on a gamble of her own, a career in film-making. Hardly had the heels of her pretty party pumps cooled or the memories of her Philadelphia coming-out party nestled securely into the part of the brain where those things go than she hastened to New York, to an interview with Emile de Antonio, and ultimately to a job as his apprentice.

There isn't much to do in the vicinity of de Antonio's West Side Manhattan studio, certainly no place good to go for lunch or a drink—it's an entirely industrial area—so he and Cinda played a lot of poker. Soon she owed him $1200. He said, "Cinda, at this rate you'll owe me a lot. Let's forget the $1200 or go on playing till you owe me the entire Firestone fortune." She preferred to honor her debt, wrote him a check. They were quits.

Dare one compare Cinda Firestone, poker player, with Cinda Firestone, film-maker? She made *Attica* without a hope in hell of getting a documentary about black prisoners into a single theater. The only footage that had been shot inside the prison yard was by a couple of black television cameramen invited there by the inmates. Firestone got that footage for $500 by convincing them they would never get the stuff on TV. She's got the *chutzpah* that took her grandpa out of the door-to-door snake-oil business and into a rubber barony.

Attica: she knew what de Antonio held in his hand, but could she match it?

The prison at Attica, New York, looks like a lovely Bavarian castle. In September 1971 inmates seized control of the yard and took hostages from the staff, issued a manifesto, and sat down to wait for a reply. The press circulated rumors of torture and murder. Governor Nelson Rockefeller ordered in the troops and quashed the rebellion. More than 40 men died. The ensuing investigation revealed US military weapons of a type outlawed by international accord had caused all hostage deaths.

Firestone's film is clearly derivative of de Antonio's work. Like *Rush to Judgment,* it is a legal brief testing hypothetical explanations of a "crime" against eyewitness reports. Like *In the Year of the Pig,* it attempts a deft black comedy of multiple perjuries. Like *Millhouse,* it is a collage of newsreel kinescopes, "innocently" acquired official footage, interviews, documents, and stills.

Bureaucratic impediments made sync-sound prisoner interviews unobtainable, so much of the eyewitness material consists of head-shot stills (nicely printed in full-tone black and white) and voice-over. All of the cutting was done to words,

and the result is that *Attica* might be more effective as a tape with an accompanying booklet.

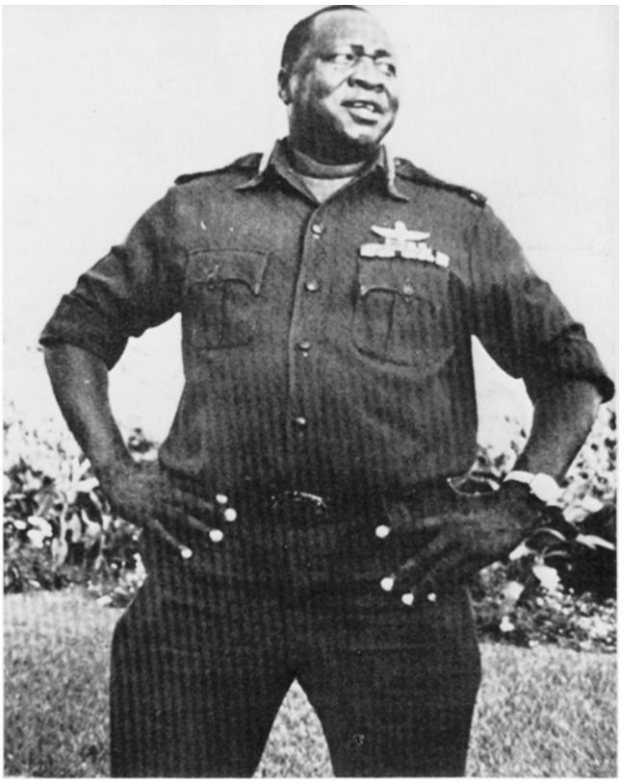
The film follows an outline of themes: dehumanization of prisoners is a requisite of prison authority; there was solidarity among prisoners of all races; this was not a riot to escape but a rebellion against unreasonable conditions; the government's reaction was a full-scale military operation; rebel leaders were tortured and even killed after "order" was restored; the prison system does not rehabilitate convicts; prison conditions are inhuman; there has been no amelioration of grievances since the uprising. The discussion of conditions is placed near the end of the film, where it breaks the narrative continuity and is poorly integrated in terms of demonstrating cause.

De Antonio's collage method is easy to copy (*The Sorrow and the Pity, Hearts and Minds, The Murder of Fred Hampton*) but difficult to copy well. The archival footage must be adequate. (Rockefeller is strongly implicated in the military suppression, but he hardly figures in the film. The attack itself is shown in poor quality long shots cut together with blown-up stills). For each major participant a *dramatis persona* must be established. It took de Antonio three years in the editing room to make a Brechtian courtroom drama out of the Army-McCarthy hearings (*Point of Order*). But in *Attica,* except in the case of one inmate, Frank Smith, who speaks, and whose family also appears, no one, regardless of numerous reappearances, emerges as a "character."

As if to compensate for these serious lapses, Firestone goes for the easy shots—a cop's beer belly, for instance. The only image with "personality" really is fortuitous: it is the plastic slipcovers on the furniture in several inmates' homes.

Attica has been well exposed on the festival circuit, probably a tribute to Firestone hustle power.

Three Filmex documentaries were about Africa: *The Vocation* by Sven Nykvist, *Last Grave at Dimbaza,* smuggled out of South Africa, and Barbet Schroeder's *General Idi Amin Dada.* Eugene Jones's Academy Award-nominated documentary, *The Wild and The Brave,* played theatrically in Los Angeles during the festival. The four films taken together offer a composite view of contemporary Africa incomplete in any one of them.



GENERAL IDI AMIN DADA

General Amin so thoroughly dominates Schroeder's overlong and disorderly film that structure is hardly evident. No apparent attempt was made to come to terms with Ugandan history or politics as a means of establishing a context for Amin's overheated prose. The film suffers from the dual liability of film-maker and subject working in a second language, English. Amin's ridiculous non sequiturs seem a result of this more than of any lack of intellect.

His braggadocio makes him an easy target for ridicule, too, and it is just this cheap humor that Buck Henry thoughtlessly exploited in his Filmex program notes, describing the film as "black *black* comedy" and its subject a blend of absurdity and horror.

A "political" reading of *General Idi Amin Dada* shows the general to be a nationalist, who

desires to expunge every vestige of European culture from his country, and an opportunist, neither capitalist nor communist, who dumped his government's alliance with Israel when national bankruptcy made alliance with the Arabs expedient. He is a populist, whose tribal dancing suggests Senator Fred Harris. He is given to bombast, letting loose ten trial balloons (on the conquest of the Golan Heights, the sex life of his ambassador to the United Nations, the British economy) in hopes that one may catch the fancy of his people or the international press. He is crazy like a fox, with a mouth like Muhammad Ali's and for the same reasons.

The Wild and the Brave shows what Amin is up against. Jones observed a period of transition in Uganda's Kidepo Valley National Park (formerly Queen Elizabeth National Park), a game preserve where Amin had ordered the white warden, Iain Ross, be replaced by a black, Paul Ssali. Ross, a colonialist's Ugandan-born son, is a strict disciplinarian who advised his successor to "break (black recruits) down and teach them to do as they're told." When asked what he will miss most when he's left the park, he replied, "the sense of command." Jones shows Ross dissatisfied that Ssali is "soft" with subordinates.

The film leapfrogs from duties of a park ranger (nurturing animals and apprehending poachers) to all those activities that accrue to figures of authority and education: sitting in judgment on violators of the laws in this remote area, training the paramilitary rangers. A hint of Ross's success (and Amin's nemesis) is the marching and stamping of black recruits like Sandhurst cadets on park parade grounds. The camera catches Ross and his wife listening anxiously to an English-language news broadcast of Amin's anti-European terrorism. Later, as a mock-grim metaphor, a thirsty bull elephant chases the Rosses away from their swimming pool so he may drink.

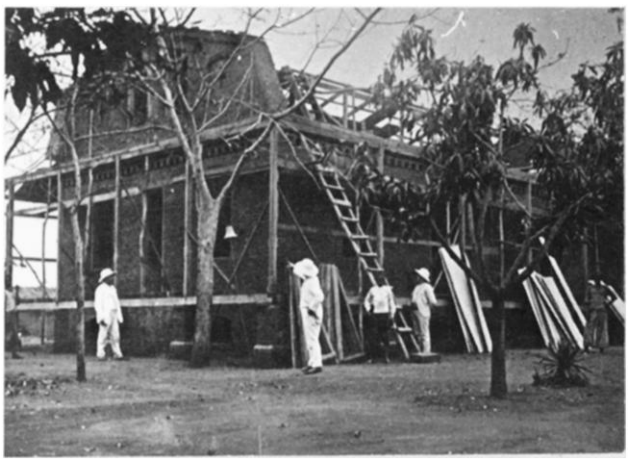
Both Jones and Schroeder like to show crocodiles. Jones plays his as strange African fauna (under a schlock Muzak score by Charles Grean). Schroeder plays his as Amin's indolent pets who might appreciate a toothsome political enemy once in a while. Reportedly under threats of death from Amin's son, Schroeder cut a scene showing Amin feeding one foe to the beasts.

Last Grave at Dimbaza is Nana Mahomo's description of the receiving end of South African apartheid, a journey through the world behind the familiar face of racism, another look at what makes black nationalist movements throughout Africa imperative. Mahomo's "subversive" camera peers into squalid huts of blacks deported to the rural Bantustans, overcrowded black schools, the alleys where blacks cart white men's trash. Images are accompanied by an indignant narration typified by the climactic announcement that during the hour that this film runs six families are deported from the cities, 60 children die, 60 blacks are arrested on trumped-up identity charges, and the gold companies make 35,000 pounds in profits. The film is a long series of depressing statistics and grim vignettes, but any five minutes of it will tell a viewer what the other 60 are like.

Nykvist's *The Vocation* is more oblique in its treatment of the roots of white supremacy in Africa. He has chosen the years 1908-1910 when his father and his first wife were missionaries in the Congo. With a picture and sound collage of still photos, old film footage and new, diaries and letters, and his own narration, Nykvist alters the typical image of the gibberish-speaking heathen mistaking the white man for a god and shows instead a society of blacks building missions for wages paid in money and goods.

Nykvist's pans across and zooms into photos

Sven Nykvist's THE VOCATION



actually seems to add depth to their flat surfaces. A series of dissolves on Ruth Nykvist culminates in a still in which a backlit pith helmet replicates a halo.

Four other features, two dramatizations, seek, like *Last Grave at Dimbaza* and *The Wild and the Brave*, to characterize a nation at a point in time: *Introduction to the Enemy* (Vietnam), *Italy: Year One*, *Akenfield* (Suffolk), and *Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?* (America).

A curious aspect of the "visit to North Vietnam" films (like *Introduction to the Enemy*, *People's War*, and *Year of the Tiger*) is that given practically identical visual material such markedly different films emerge. On their guided tours, the film-makers were shown the same SAM missile launchers, the devastated Bach Mai Hospital, the crater-pocked Highway One, the cottage industries where American jets become Vietnamese bicycles, the textile mill at Hanoi, the children's calisthenics classes.

Introduction to the Enemy records the April 1974 tour of the North and PRG-controlled province of Quang Tri in the South taken by Jane Fonda, Tom Hayden, and Haskell Wexler. *Enemy* has the simplest imaginable premise: to reverse our government's strategy of facelessness, to introduce the American viewer to the Vietnamese, add a face to the statistics.

The Indochina Peace Campaign, of which Hayden and Fonda are the principal spokespeople, was one of the very few groups not to lose interest in Vietnam once our troops were withdrawn. The film was tailor made for use by them in propagandizing against continuing U.S. aid to the Thieu regime and in their effort to make the antiwar movement grow as a major social force even after this war has ended. After all, if our economy continues to depend in large part on military expenditures, there will have to be more Vietnams.

Enemy has humility. Fonda and Hayden share what they know as a narration. We see them as interviewers, asking questions—not arrogantly, not policy questions, but "people" questions. As an expression of the contradictions Americans still feel about the movie star-revolutionary, *Enemy* includes a scene where a Vietnamese star works as a printers apprentice in preparation for a role.

Wexler's camerwork is prone to the cliche, e.g. a pan beginning inside a cannon muzzle or a handshake in front of the lens, but he still commands a lyric quality often absent in the hustle-bustle of the official tour. This includes butterfly-winged sailboats and a remarkably poignant death scene following a mine explosion (reminiscent of the death scene at the end of his *Brazil: A Report on Torture*).

With *Italy: Year One* Robert Rossellini returns to the Italy of the end of World War II, the Italy of *Paisan* but in the style of his recent television documentaries. Rossellini scholar John Dorr hypothesized in his Filmex program notes that the director has chosen "this period in Italian history for its parallels to possible imminent international breakdowns of social-political-economic institutions." But this seems inadequate an as explanation of a film-maker's purpose. One need only compare Rossellini's "historical" *Blaise Pascal* (also shown at Filmex) with Losey's "political" *Galileo* to see that Dorr has misinterpreted Rossellini's impulses.

It would appear on the other hand that Rossellini has not been impervious to a European film-making trend that may soon grow large enough to be counted a full-fledged genre in itself, "nostalgia for fascist repression." It is a genre set in motion by Visconti (*The Damned*) and Costa-Gavras (*Z*) and including work by Bellochio, Bertolucci, Cavani, de Concini, de Sica, Duffel, Fellini, Losey, Malle, Marcel Ophuls, Rosi, Saura, Szabo, Verneuil, and Wertmüller. (Resnais's interest in the period predates the genre.)

Rossellini's entry in the field is a singular one, indeed, since his fascists are phantoms. His film begins with the last days of the war when allied forces chased the German army out of Italy. Allied tanks advance with guns ablaze, but we never see the opposition forces. Romans emerging from their homes find the liberation forces asleep in their jeeps. Throughout the film, which consists in large part of political debates on questions of the postwar reconstruction period, there is much talk of the threat of a fascist resurgence, yet the fascists are not seen even once. Could Rossellini be

suggesting that the threat was not real, that it was imagined or even promulgated as a political scare tactic?

Consistent with others of his recent films, *Italy: Year One* includes scene-length takes with a camera that zooms in and out, isolating a figure as he declaims an important historical position, then pulling back to place him and his opinions in a context of setting and fellow debaters. The central figure here is Premier Alcide de Gaspari, a Christian Democrat, sensitive to the desires of Washington and London, eager for an anti-fascist coalition of political parties, reluctantly conceding that capitalism is the only -ism that can rebuild the Italian economy, wary lest by this choice he lose the support of the communist working class.

Rossellini's metaphors are overwhelming. Besides the utter absence of fascists and the zooms which equate the frame lines with history itself, there are remarkable vignettes: sound trucks, announcing the platforms of the contending parties, drive in circles around the base of the statue of Garibaldi, the unifier of Italy; as the years go by the camera angle on a party of cafe politicos is more and more severely from the right.

Roberto Rossellini's ITALY: YEAR ONE

Like *Enemy, Dimbaza,* and *Italy: Year One, Akenfield* is intended to make some political sense of historical data, this time the exploitation of farm workers in Suffolk. Ronald Blythe has milked a fiction narrative from his book of interviews with Suffolk villagers. Using nonprofessional actors and improvisation (and a very high shooting ratio of shot to finally utilized film) director Peter Hall has made what he likens to a home movie, a kind of tepid mixture of Marx and Gainsborough. There is a fading essence of angry young Briton here but nothing that Ken Loach (*Kes* and *Wednesday's Child*) and Barney Platt-Mills (*Bronco Bullfrog*) have not done better and before.

Despite the arguable assertion by *Akenfield* producer Rex Pyke that both Loach and Platt-Mills use professional actors and rehearsed dialogue, the home-movie analogy seems hardly credible in view of the deliberate and tiresome metaphors, like little peasant boys falling into mud puddles in front of grown men, associative cutting from coitus interruptus to a boot smashing hens' eggs, a romantic score supposedly full of the turbulence of youth, and a numbing penchant for reaction shots.

Basically the plot turns on a young man who questions whether the fact that farm workers have always been the wage slaves of the country squire is sufficient reason for the system to continue. He emigrates to Australia.

Dimbaza and *Enemy* are propaganda films. *Akenfield* has a residual, radical querulousness. Even *Italy: Year One* gives proof of Rossellini's dispassionate eye for social experience. Not so *Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?,* which is less a history film than a fradulent memory (or nostalgia) film. Though both recorded history and memory

AKENFIELD

are subjective, the former is systematic and need not be a record of the author's own experience, while the latter is exactly the opposite, unsystematic and based solely on experience.

Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?, a crass British venture aimed at an American market, treats the period the Great Depression with the cunning superficiality of a yarn-spinning historian like Frederick Lewis Allen (*Only Yesterday, Since Yesterday*). It is an anecdotal collage of news clips and film clips that ignores despair and suggest that by comparison with the world today the thirties were a lark. This is the panglossian vision of Americans as "just folks." Funny faces, King Kong, human cannon balls, identical twins, pretty girls, skyscraper window washers, and Eleanor Roosevelt dancing the jitterbug. (It's all been on TV dozens of times before.)

Allen wrote his book about the thirties, *Since Yesterday,* in 1939. All his contemporary readers had real experience of the Depression. *Dime?,* by contrast, is a fake, not a jogger of the "inward eye" of memory, but an imposer of a fresh vision masquerading as memory—audience demographics being what they are, most of the audience for this film will have had no experience of the thirties whatsoever. In this strategy the Cagney and Bogart clips are a transparent tactic, since they are (through TV and film society screenings) as much icons of the sixties and seventies as they are of the thirties. Mora intercuts them with his other material to give everything the flavor of family album instead of highschool history text.

The hasty "political" ending, a roll call of the Presidents from FDR to Ford and an optically printed explosion on Wall Street, is either a shabby claim to radical credentials or an admission that the rest of the film falls short of conveying the "message."

BROTHER, CAN YOU SPARE A DIME? Marathon dancing.

Controversy and Correspondence

AGAINST "THE SYSTEM OF THE SUTURE"

These remarks are occasioned by Daniel Dayan's article, "The Tutor-Code of Classical Cinema" (*Film Quarterly*, Fall 1974).

Dayan is interested in what he calls the "system of enunciation" basic to "classical" cinema.

He writes, "Structuralist critics such as Barthes and the *Cahiers du Cinéma* of *'Young Mr. Lincoln'* have shown that the level of fiction is organized into a language of sorts, a mythical organization through which ideology is produced and expressed. Equally important, however, and far less studied, is filmic enunciation, the system that negotiates the viewer's access to the film—the system that 'speaks' the fiction."

The system of enunciation of classical cinema, the "tutor-code" which "speaks the codes on which the fiction depends," is, according to Dayan (here as elsewhere in the article in large part summarizing the ideas of Jean-Pierre Oudart, who in turn draws on many sources) *the system of the suture.*

This is not the forum for a detailed criticism of Dayan's position from a theoretical point of view. Such a criticism might well systemically investigate his use of terms such as "ideology," "system," "codes," "classical cinema," "fiction," "enunciation," "de-construction" and so on—each of which is used in a way loaded with theoretical implications which could be challenged. Nor for a thorough analysis of the prose strategy of invoking—and assuming the authority of—a body of writing that is only partially explained, left unavailable to the ordinary reader's independent criticism. Nor for a critical account of the inter-penetration of structuralism, semiology, modernism, and Marxism which finds expression in Oudart and the other writers Dayan cites.

I will rather concentrate on what I take to be clear-cut flaws in Dayan's argument.

According to Oudart/Dayan, the system of the suture is grounded in a two-shot figure. This figure causes the viewer's experience to conform to a certain scenario.

In the first shot, the viewer discovers the frame.

When the viewer discovers the frame—the first step in reading the film—the triumph of his former *possession* of the image fades out. The viewer discovers that the camera is hiding things, and therefore distrusts it and the frame itself, which he now understands to be arbitrary. He wonders why the frame is what it is. This radically transforms his mode of participation—the unreal space between characters and/or objects is no longer perceived as pleasurable. . . . He feels dispossessed of what he is prevented from seeing. He discovers that he is only authorized to see what happens to be in the axis of the glance of another spectator, who is ghostly or absent. This ghost, who rules over the frame and robs the spectator of his pleasure, Oudart proposes to call "the absent-one."

In the second shot, the reverse-field shot of the first, "the missing field is abolished by the presence of somebody or something occupying the absent-one's field. The reverse shot represents the fictional owner of the glance corresponding to shot one."

The first shot as it were opens a hole in the spectator's imaginary relationship with the filmic field. This hole is "sutured" by the shot of the character presented as the absent-one of the preceding shot. Then "the spectator can resume his previous relationship with the film."

At the same time, the second shot constitutes the *meaning* of the first shot, and the system of the suture makes a "cinematographic statement" out of the pair of shots. The first shot presents, say, a view looking across Bodega Bay to the Brenner home, and as it were raises the question, "Whose view is this?"* The second shot presents itself as

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* Throughout, I will use this example from *The Birds.* The sequence is analyzed in detail, shot by shot, by Raymond Bellour in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, no. 216 (Oct., 1969) pp. 24-38.

answering that question, and thereby revealing the meaning of the first shot. It is *Melanie Daniels's* view.

It is Oudart's, and Dayan's, central contention that this system is an intrinsically tyrannical one. "It does not merely convey neutrally the ideology of the fictional level. . . . It is built so as to mask the ideological origin and nature of cinematographic statements." The first shot raises a question as to the source of the image. The second shot identifies that source as a character within the fiction. The two-shot figure constitutes a statement about itself. This statement is a *lie.*

Dayan argues that this sequence of "experiences" (the viewer's discomforting discovery of the frame; his uncertainty as to why the frame is what it is; his realization that he is only authorized to see what is contained in the glance of an "absent-one" who rules over that frame; his acceptance of the figure shown in the subsequent reverse shot *as* that sovereign "absent-one") is not contingent: it is the effect of a system.

But *what* is the "system" of which the above outlined experiences are effects? Studying Dayan's article, it becomes clear that he has not in fact described any mechanism which could cause a viewer to "discover the frame," and so on.

I see this failure as linked to a general uncertainty as to the actual role of the "system of the suture" in classical film. At times, Dayan writes as if it were *the* "system of enunciation" of classical cinema ("The system of the suture is to classical cinema what verbal language is to literature," etc.). But at other times (e.g., in a footnote that appears added as an afterthought, despite the apparent centrality of the point it registers) he modifies the claim: it is *one* of the central enunciation systems of classical cinema (although still a "privileged" one).

The Oudart/Dayan scenario is predicated on a "previous" relationship which the viewer is said to enjoy with the film—an initial relationship that is supposedly disrupted by the viewer's discovery of the frame, and to which he returns when that disruption is "sutured." Dayan understands this to be a relationship in which the viewer "sees" rather than "reads" the film. This relationship is comparable to the relationship between spectator and representational painting, as Oudart analyzes it.

Then how and why is this relationship disrupted?

Is it that film "naturally" disrupts this relationship? If that were the case, there would be no need for an explanation of the *means* by which classical cinema effects such a disruption, nor for an account of its (historical) motivation. Is it that this disruption is the necessary consquence of cutting from shot to shot in a film (as Dayan seems to suggest at one point)? But then it would need to be explained why shot changes were ever instituted.

In fact, the natural suggestion is that the strategies and "rules" of *continuity cutting* developed by Griffith and his contemporaries and followers (crystallized in the "30°rule," the "180° rule," etc.) constituted precisely a system for sustaining *across shot changes* just that relationship between the viewer and the film that Dayan takes to be disruptive by the viewer's discovering of the frame. That meant that the "system of the suture" was—for some reason, and in some manner—instituted despite the priority of a system which would appear to have satisfied the demands of *bourgeois* "illusionism." Given the system of continuity cutting (which would seem to have made film an extension of painting's system of representation), the viewer had to be *made* aware of the frame for the "system of the suture" to be instituted. How this awareness was effected, and what motivated the institution of this system, then become questions crucial to our understanding of "classical cinema" and its history.

Although I cannot argue this claim here, I would wish to assert that once the relationship between continuity cutting and the "system of the suture" (that is to say, *point-of-view cutting*)* is opened up to serious investigation, Dayan's assumption of a "previous relationship" in which

* Dayan avoids the term "point-of-view shot." I see no reason to follow him in this. The kind of shot whose frame is discovered in his scenario is what everyone knows is called a point-of-view shot. Dayan's terminology gives us no way of referring to the "figure" of which the point-of-view shot is part. If we call it a

the viewer "sees" the film image as unmediated image of reality will have to be challenged. The time has come for a re-examination of the whole idea that classical narrative continuity is "illusionistic." I will here only suggest that Dayan's avoidance of a serious consideration of the historical motivation of the "system of the suture" and his avoidance of a serious consideration of continuity cutting in general, are aspects of a single strategy.

Once we address ourselves to the question of how the viewer actually reads a point-of-view shot, a fundamental error in the Oudart/Dayan scenario becomes apparent.

The scenario presumes that the "system of the suture" is based on a two-shot (view/viewer) figure: a pair of shots which together constitute a complete cinematographic statement.

But in fact, the point-of-view shot is ordinarily (that is to say: *always*, except in special cases) part of a three-shot (viewer/view/viewer) sequence.

Typically, such a sequence is initiated when, within an "objective" shot, a character visibly attends to something outside the borders of the frame. For example, Melanie looks out from her boat to something we cannot see. This constitutes a cue that the next shot may be a point-of-view shot presenting that "absent-view" to the viewer. Sure enough, we get the shot looking across the Bay, as if in response to the question, "What is she looking at?" (or "What does she see?"). Then we get a "reaction shot," which shows us Melanie's reaction to what she has seen, and at the same time confirms that the previous shot *was* from her point of view. (As is usual with Hitchcock, no particular identifiable emotion is registered in the reaction shot.)*

Thus the point-of-view shot is ordinarily introduced by a shot which calls attention to its own frame by indicating (by a *cue*) that there is something about to be shown that lies outside the boundaries of that frame. This cue is a condition of the viewer's discovery of the frame of the point-of-view shot itself. The viewer recognizes this as a point-of-view shot from Melanie's point of view in part because the cue establishes the significance of Melanie's absence from the following frame. The viewer perceives Melanie as significantly absented from that frame, and hence indirectly perceives the frame. This perception is a condition of the viewer's reading of the shot as one from Melanie's point of view.

Note that this specifically reverses the Oudart/Dayan scenario. It is not that the viewer discovers the frame of the shot looking out across Bodega Bay (unaccountably), infers a sovereign "absent-

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"shot/reverse shot pair," that does not differentiate it from the shot/reverse shot forms which do *not* contain point-of-view shots. In *The Birds*, the dialogue between Melanie and the mother is an example of this non-point-of-view shot/reverse shot form. Characteristically used in the filming of dialogues, it is logically and historically distinct from the kind of point-of-view sequence Dayan is describing. Then again, point-of-view sequences must also be differentiated from "subjective" sequences which attempt to render directly non-objective states of consciousness (rather than a view objectively seen by a fictional viewer). Hitchcock uses subjective rather than point-of-view form in *Notorious*, for example, to convey Ingrid Bergman's experience of poisoning.

* Two points:

(a) The third shot can double as the initial shot of a second point-of-view sequence. The shot that presents Melanie's reaction to what she has just seen also shows her continuing to look. Thus it contains a cue that prepares the viewer for another point-of-view shot. An extended series of telescoped point-of-view sequences can be constructed in this way. (This is in fact the case at this point in *The Birds*.) Dayan's model cannot easily accommodate this possibility.

(b) A general distinction can be drawn between point-of-view sequences which attribute a particular (psychological) reaction to the character whose view is presented, and sequences which provide no psychologically unambiguous reaction shot. The Hitchcock point-of-view sequence ordinarily authorizes the viewer to accept with no possibility of doubt that the character has seen what the point-of-view shot has just shown. The meaning of that view is not revealed by the character's "reaction," but in the actions he proceeds to take which acknowledge, or withhold acknowledgment of, what he has witnessed.

one" and falls prey to a tyrannical system which makes him take Melanie, shown in the reverse shot, to be that absent-one. Rather, following upon the first shot of the sequence with its conventional cue that asserts its frame, the viewer perceives Melanie's absence from the next frame. Perception of this specific absence is a condition of the viewer's reading of it as a shot from her point of view. This reading is confirmed by the third shot of the sequence, with its return to Melanie.

No ghostly sovereign is invoked by the point-of-view sequence.

According to the Oudart/Dayan scenario, the viewer discovers that he is "only authorized to see what happens to be in the axis of the glance of another spectator, who is ghostly or absent." *This ghost rules over the frame and robs the spectator of his pleasure.* The implication is that it is this ghost who "authorizes" the shot we are presented, who is *responsible* for the film, who *produces* the image. Thus when we accept as that "absent-one" the figure shown in the reverse shot, we are accepting what is in reality a fictional character created by the film as the creator of the film. We accept a lying statement as to the film's real source or production.

But when the viewer takes Melanie to be the "owner" of the glance corresponding to the point-of-view shot, he in no way regards Melanie as *authorizing* that shot. On the contrary, the point-of-view shot is read as an *appropriation* of her gaze. It is read as *unauthorized* by her.

The point-of-view sequence, then, ordinarily manifests the film's power of appropriating a character's gaze without authorization. It does *not* then present a figure and force the viewer to accept it as the source of that power.

Thus the point-of-view sequence in itself does not constitute a lying statement about its own real origin. Melanie is *not* presented as the real source of the image we read as "hers." The image of Melanie is manifestly derived from the same source as the image that we read as an appropriation of her gaze. Again, the sequence in itself does not constitute a statement about that source. (But the possibility cannot be ruled out *a priori* that the film as a whole inscribes a statement about that source, which may truthfully acknowledge that this is a film and its world is not present.)

Dayan writes as if viewers did not know what point-of-view shots *were,* as if they did not possess the *category* of the point-of-view shot. But of course, films that use point-of-view shots are designed for viewers who are familiar with their logic, who know how to recognize and read them.

I have spoken of the viewer's perception of "cues" that lead him to read the subsequent shot as a point-of-view shot. It is perfectly possible for a viewer to recognize such a cue and to read the point-of-view sequence correctly whether or not he has had any particular "experiences" at all. A point-of-view sequence does not depend for its reading on its "effects." It is an error to suppose that point-of-view sequences simply correspond to some "system" that can be defined by its "effects."

Not only is a point-of-view sequence not dependent for its reading on any particular effects, but its reading also does not depend on the viewer's acceptance of the *reality* of the world projected in the film. The viewer can "read" a point-of-view sequence whether or not he takes the film's world to correspond to "reality."

Dayan has given no argument that counters the commonsense position that the "effects" of a point-of-view sequence depend on the sequence, its context within the particular film, and also on the viewer's stance toward it. So too, whether a point-of-view sequence is integral to an ideological project of a particular kind depends on the sequence and on the film. And whether a film's ideological project is *successful*—whether a viewer will actually submit to a film designed to tyrannize —depends in part on the attitude of the viewer.

Part of what I am saying is that the point-of-view sequence in itself makes no statement about reality—that is, makes no statement—at all.

Christian Metz erred in his supposition that a single shot in a "classical" film is equivalent to a *sentence.* As Dayan shows, a single shot is ordinarily incomplete ("grammatically"). But Dayan in turn is wrong in concluding that a "sutured" sequence of shots in itself constitutes a

statement. The point-of-view sequence, with its syntactical structure, is analogous to a *sentence,* not a statement. In itself, it makes no claim that is true or false.

Films have been used in many ways. The making of various kinds of statements is, historically, among the uses of "classical" films. In order to make its statement, a film may require that a particular point-of-view sequence be placed in a specific setting within it.

Again, it seems to me that it is the film and not the sequence that constitutes the statement (if the film *makes* a statement). The statement thus made by a film may be, at one level, a statement—lying or truthful—about itself. Whether a film makes a false statement about itself, or about the world, cannot be settled merely by determining whether the film incorporates point-of-view sequences into its form.*

I think it is clear that Dayan has not succeeded in demonstrating that a point-of-view sequence as such, by its very nature, necessarily turns any film that depends on it (and thus the whole body of "classical" films) into a system of *bourgeois* ideology. *Distinctions have to made,* grounded in serious acts of criticism, and integrated into a serious history.

But Dayan's argument was designed as a demonstration that such distinctions do not have to be made. If classical cinema depends on a system of enunciation that is by its very nature ideological (*bourgeois*), then criticism and history can be reduced to (replaced by) "de-construction."

Dayan begins from the assumption that he already knows what "classical cinema" *is:* a *bourgeois* ideological system. Of course, he also assumes that he already knows what "*bourgeois* ideology" is. Dayan's writing reveals the attitude that "*bourgeois* ideology" and "classical cinema" are a-historical absolutes, linked by their essences which may be abstracted from history. Throughout Dayan's article, there is an unacknowledged tension between the Marxist trappings he adopts and the fundamentally anti-Marxist idea that point-of-view sequences and hence "classical" films are *by their very nature* (regardless of history) reflections of a timeless *bourgeois* ideology.

The commonsense position would appear to be that "classical cinema" has through its complex history served a variety of masters. "Classical" films, to be sure, have in countless cases served many different forms of *bourgeois* ideology. But they have also been instrumental in concrete attacks on particular ideological forms. Nor has Dayan said anything which would rule out the possibility that there have been "classical" films that were their *own* masters.

We ought not to let ourselves feel constrained from the outset to deny on *a priori* grounds that there are fundamental differences among point-of-view sequences and the films that use them.

Dayan argues that *Wind from the East* resorts to an alternative system of enunciation in formulating its anti-*bourgeois* acknowledgment of its own form and production. But *Man with a Movie Camera* would appear to be no less anti-*bourgeois* for its systematic use of point-of-view technique (Vertov can be said to use point-of-view sequences in this film as a tool for his deconstruction of conventional narrative forms).* And I have been working on a critical analysis of late Hitchcock films which attempts to demonstrate that Hitchcock attacks conventional uses of point-of-view

* Dayan is clearly wrong as well in suggesting that the shot of the "owner" constitutes the *meaning* of the point-of-view shot. If that were so, what is contained within the frame of the point-of-view shot itself would be irrelevant to its meaning. That is hardly plausible. The point-of-view shot has significance within the film, which arises in part from the identity of the character whose view it is, in part from the occasion of his act of viewing, and in part from what is contained in the view itself. In the same way, the meaning of an utterance "in the real world" is determined by the identity of the person who utters it, by the specific circumstances of his act of uttering these words, and also by the meanings of the words he utters.

* Linda Podheiser has analyzed Vertov's use of point-of-view technique in an unpublished paper.

form by taking its logic absolutely seriously. Hitchcock does not "deconstruct" the fundamental forms of "classical cinema": he acknowledges the meanings his films have accorded them.

Again: what we need is a serious history of cinematic forms, grounded in critical analyses of the significant uses to which these forms were put. Dayan proposes in place of such a concrete history an *a priori* demonstration that certain forms of cinema are destined by their nature to serve *bourgeois* ideology, and thus do not stand in need of serious critical acknowledgment.

—WILLIAM ROTHMAN

Reviews

AMARCORD

Director: Federico Fellini. Script: Fellini and Tonino Guerra. Photography: Giuseppe Rotunno. Music: Nino Rota. New World Pictures.

Fellini has spoiled us. For over twenty years now, he has regaled us with a series of increasingly fanciful films, explosions of color and decor that were stamped with his own extroverted personality. In film after film, Fellini seduced us with his frescoes of carnival decadence, his sensuous world of jaded aristocrats, circus clowns, and grotesques.

Some people, though, didn't want to be invited to the Fellini party; the nay-sayers regarded Fellini's exuberant fantasies as self-indulgent betrayals of his neorealist roots. As if in answer to his most outspoken critics, Fellini has now offered us a modest humanist comedy for which he's received almost unanimous acclaim. The critical response to *Amarcord* has been that Fellini has finally put aside the excesses of his baroque mannerist phase in order to return to his original sources. Many critics have responded with almost a sense of relief, as if Fellini has purified his art by reuniting his work with his "noblest" impulses.

I disagree. *Amarcord* may be the director's warmest, most subdued film (who goes to Fellini for warmth and good nature?), but it is also his safest. I miss the grand flourishes, the master showmanship, the epic heightening, that I've come to expect from Fellini. *Amarcord* lacks the vigor and drive, the joyous high spirits and sense of release that have been for me the chief pleasures of Fellini's work. Though it's true that Fellini has begun to repeat effects, and even to parody himself, his recent films were all charged by a sense of experimentation and a love of film form that was infectious. *Amarcord* simply doesn't have the *brio* and the flair of the best Fellini.

Critics who regard the film as a return to the humanist realist tradition are mistaken: *Amarcord* is a trimming away, a paring down, rather than a return to the style of his earliest films. Though Fellini's first efforts were nurtured by the postwar neorealist films of DeSica and Rossellini, Fellini has always shown impatience with strict realism. Rather than objectively recording the surfaces of Italian life, he always worked from personal predilections that hardened into obsessions. In his own richly imaginative way, he combined the two strains that have always dominated Italian movies: the epic tradition, with its fondness for spectacle and operatic gesture, and the humanist tradition with its deep feeling for the outcast and the oppressed.

Since *Juliet of the Spirits* in 1965, Fellini has emphasized spectacle at the expense of characterization. Largely bypassing the concern for individual character that marked *La Strada* and *Nights of Cabiria* and the literary and philosophical speculations that enriched *La Dolce Vita* and *8½*, Fellini went on to entertain his audience with a procession of extravagant, mostly erotic, fantasies. (*Fellini Satyricon*, a cornucopia of florid hothouse images, is the masterwork of this late phase.)

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AMARCORD

In these recent mannerist films, in which more than ever the director held us by the sheer force of his personality, Fellini has earned the right to include his name in the title. A magician, a ringmaster, the most high-spirited of MCs, Fellini transformed ancient and modern Rome to fit the dimensions of his own vivid fantasies. *Fellini's Roma* was unlike the Rome any tourist has ever seen: in a series of apocalyptic images, Fellini offered a great mad painter's Last Judgment rendition of the Eternal City. *Roma* represented the purest example of the director's interest in playfully reinterpreting reality: a real city was reflected through the prism of a fevered imagination.

Amarcord, like all of Fellini's work, far from being a "return" or a "departure," is a blend of the real and the fanciful—it's a distinctly stylized version of Italian life. This time, though, Fellini has avoided a circus atmosphere; the film isn't the collection of breathtaking tableaux that is, for me, the essential Fellini. He has deliberately simplified his canvas, but he hasn't substituted anything in place of the intoxications of his previous work. *Amarcord* is a muted reminiscence of life in a seaside town of forty years ago, and the memoir is almost entirely free of character insights or absorbing incidents. Visually, structurally, thematically, it's the director's most unencumbered work.

Fellini doesn't impose himself on the material to the degree he has in his most recent films, but he hasn't found anyone else to guide us through the film's fragmented panorama. The point of view is shifting, confused. This chronicle of a year in the life of a provincial town needs a strong unifying presence—from whose perspective are we seeing the events? There's a narrator who has much the same function as the Stage Manager in *Our Town,* but Fellini's treatment of him is absent-minded; he forgets about him for such long periods that when he re-enters he seems intrusive. The adolescent boy who is the logical choice for the hero (and who also serves from time to time as half-hearted narrator) is dimly presented; he merely laughs and looks pleasant.

Fellini keeps us away from all his characters. His main family, who are the anchor and focus for the anecdotes, are simply stage Italians, comic opera buffoons who conform to facile preconceptions about what Italians are like:

they're hot-tempered, warm-hearted, they gesture extravagantly. We're encouraged to laugh at their squabbles, and then, when the mother dies unexpectedly, we're to be moved by their vulnerability. The pathos is unearned.

The townspeople consist of the usual Fellini dramatis personae, only the types this time are less vivid and exact. As an object of lust for adolescents, the fat tobacconist here is no match for La Saraghina in *8½*. The town nymphomaniac is much less vital a presence than her counterpart in *Satyricon*. Only Gradisca, the town's most womanly woman, emerges full-bodied from among the tapestry-like figures; Magali Noel's lush performance transcends caricature.

As a treatment of adolescence, the film is ordinary. Sexual initiation is mined for conventional comedy. As a chronicle of a town, the film is surprisingly flavorless. The town never really comes alive, is never felt as a dramatic presence the way Rome is in *Fellini's Roma*. As a human comedy, the film is also attenuated. Though Fellini includes a death, ends with a marriage, and details the passage of the seasons, most of the anecdotes are too wispy to support the mythic framework.

Of course there are images that only a master could manage: a great ocean liner, its myriad blinking lights outlined against a pitch-black sky, passes in the night; a peacock elegantly spreads its tail in gently falling snow. But even on the big set-pieces, Fellini works with muted authority and to diminished effect. The film opens with a bonfire which the townspeople build as an homage to spring: the event is edited in a staccato, disjointed style, and the scene is rushed, curiously played down: where is the fanfare, the sense of occasion? The town boasts a magnificent white hotel, but Fellini hasn't known how best to use it: the stories he tells in it and the characters he fills it with are strained and lackluster.

Compare the finale here (Gradisca's marriage) to the procession of the characters in *8½*. The ending of *Amarcord* is strangely offhand; the camera pans the remnants of the marriage feast, randomly picking out pockets of scattered activity. The composition is deliberately unstructured, nonpictorial, but it's also unimpressive—there's nothing to hold on to. The finale completely lacks the sense of communion or the joyous resolution or the formal beauty which have marked every one of the director's previous endings. Easy, likable, filled with flashes of charm, *Amarcord* is Fellini's thinnest performance. —FOSTER HIRSCH

PART-TIME WORK OF A DOMESTIC SLAVE

Director: Alexander Kluge. Script: Hans Drawe and H.D. Muller. Photography: Thomas Mauch. Kairos Film.

Part-Time Work of a Domestic Slave, the third feature of West German director Alexander Kluge, revolves around six months in the life of one Rosewitha Bronski—at 29, wife, mother, abortionist, and growing political activist. Rosewitha is a part-time personality; partly in the home, functioning as wife and mother; partly in the factory, organizing workers; partly working as an abortionist. (Like Mother Courage, the Brecht protagonist who feeds off the Thirty Years War to keep her family and finances intact, Rosewitha absurdly performs abortions to afford more children of her own.) Rosewitha's life is anarchic—in bits and pieces of half-shaped ideas and unresolved actions against the disorder and injustices surrounding her: doctors who don't pay fees, factories plotting relocation, husband and children screaming for attention.

Kluge likewise disjoints his narrative with basic Brechtian alienating devices, interjecting voice-over and filmic inserts as comments on Rosewitha's domestic and political activities. Her story is told in Epic/episodic fashion, with the film divided into two major segments: the first focusing on her family life and abortion practice, while the second half follows Rosewitha outside the home and into political organizing. The parts are bridged by discussions and debates between Rosewitha and a female comrade about "what to do politically."

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Alexandra Kluge as Rosewitha

Rosewitha is married to Franz, a gloomy, unemployed chemist. He piles books across the floors, walls, windows, and cracked crevices of their pin-hole apartment. He hates their life, is ill-tempered, and bickers about Rosewitha's friends, the children, baby-sitting, her sloppiness, laziness, tardiness, etcetera and etcetera. He admonishes Rosewitha, "Why isn't dinner ready? Can't you keep the children quiet? Don't you know I'm studying?" and secretly dreams of foreign employment, release from domestic ties.

Rosewitha met Franz in school, where she was a chemistry student too. Now, between family and abortions, she possesses neither time nor energy for intellectual pursuits. Rosewitha borrows books from the local library, hoping to keep up with Franz's cerebral activities. But the demands of her small child interrupt her studies, and piles of unread volumes collect upside down on her desk. The texts are digested by Franz, who afterward lectures Rosewitha on their contents.

Pathetic Rosewitha—the situation is stultifying. Yet it gets worse. When a police investigation forces her to abandon her lucrative abortion business, Rosewitha is confined to home. While Franz takes a dreaded factory job, Rosewitha is the domestic slave in the truest sense, no longer fulfilling any function beyond the boundaries of her family. And she hates this life as surely as Franz loathed their prior existence. Satisfaction can be reached only through some meaningful, but as yet undefined, cause. Rosewitha takes to political activity.

Rosewitha and Sylvia, her ex-partner in the abortion business, begin a process of radical education. They read: newspapers, pamphlets, political tracts—anything. They listen to and try memorizing words from Brecht's *Three Penny Opera*. They partake of investigative excursions through West German tenements and demand that the city newspaper print atrocity stories about the local factory and slum conditions. But the women are too disorganized to know what they want the stories to say.

Rosewitha and Sylvia finally find a concrete political issue. They discover the factory's secret plans to relocate—an illegal act which would leave nearly all the workers, including Franz, unemployed. The women get jobs in the factory, join the union, intent upon mobilizing a workers' force against management. They leaflet employees, paint slogans on the factory walls, rifle confidential files searching for proof of the pending move (with Rosewitha nearly getting shot in one such midnight raid). But they never find the evidence and fail to motivate—and even alienate—the factory workers.

Sylvia returns home, and Rosewitha continues alone, traveling to a distant city where she uncovers material proof that a new factory is being built. But, in her fervor, Rosewitha neglects to bring a camera to record the evidence, and the trip is wasted. She returns home to discover Franz has lost his job due to her agitation, and the factory has publicly announced its decision *not* to move. It seems Rosewitha has made a mess out of everything.

Yet even after her setbacks, Rosewitha continues to challenge the economic and social morass around her. She is last observed selling sausages in a kiosk located outside the factory gates. And "the troublemaker Bronski" wraps her goods in precious political leaflets.

At times it appears that director Kluge is making a mockery of Rosewitha as he comments on her political methodology—individualized struggle, initiated as much out of fear of domestic servitude as out of true political commitment. One minute Rosewitha is portrayed as a loon, barely capable of functioning, driving her automobile into other parked cars. Yet the next instant she is

seen capably hammering out the dented fender so she can drive home and—good citizen—leaving a note of explanation to the smashed auto's owner. She appears a proficient abortionist (with graphic, if not necessarily accurate, details of her work shown on the screen). She is confident enough to call the needed help for dangerously ill clients, including those carelessly treated by other abortionists. But when she is angered by a doctor who mistreats her, calls her "low life" and refuses to pay her referral fee, Rosewitha demolishes his car with a hammer. (Interestingly, it is the same tool she used to mend the other car.)

The terrific gut satisfaction of her action swiftly disappears with knowledge that she has lost her referral fee and, for related reasons, her abortion practice as well. As noted earlier, Rosewitha travels far investigating the factory but is too addled to bring a camera to record her findings, also too flustered to report conditions for the local newspaper. She prowls the factory at midnight, risking her life from a management assassin's bullet, but she fails to organize the workers.

If Rosewitha and Sylvia are to sit home memorizing Brecht, they would do well minding the solid advice Mother Courage offers a young soldier in the scene of "The Great Capitulation." Her words seem a reference to Rosewitha's hammer-wielding method of fighting social injustice, as she distinguishes between what Eric Bentley calls "the anger of a sudden fit, which boils up and over and is gone," and the anger which "informs . . . of long years of change."[2] Mother Courage preaches: "How long won't you stand for injustice? One hour? Or two? . . . I only say your rage won't last. You'll get nowhere with it, it's a pity. If your rage was a long one, I'd urge you on. Slice him up, I'd advise. But what's the use if you don't slice him up? . . . They know us through and through . . ."

Rosewitha must prepare for the long haul; the struggle that doesn't quit quickly; the anger that transcends the smashing of a car. Rosewitha is a dynamo, but she is flaying futilely in the context of undisciplined political consciousness, removed from ideology. Like Vera Chytilova's crazy nihilists, Mary I and Mary II of *Daisies,* who decide that "since everything is rotten in this world, we too shall be rotten," Rosewitha must learn that there is more to righting the rotten world than tearing about outrageously.

The narrative of *Part-Time Work of a Domestic Slave* is intercut by Kluge with clips from the 1934 Soviet films *Chapayev.* As these segments are shown, a narrator comments, "Rosewitha knows the power of ideas . . . She has seen it proven in films." From *Chapayev,* Kluge suggests, Rosewitha can gain her most significant political lesson. (Is Kluge taking a seemingly Stalinist position in advocating that Rosewitha learn from this particular Russian movie?) *Chapayev* concerns the famous peasant general who fought with the Leninists against the White Russians. Chapayev (a Stalin surrogate?) was an enthusiast, a talented amateur tactician, who acted impulsively and emotionally rather than theoretically. In the film, an educated, urban Leninist teaches Chapayev temperance and ideology, and, when he leaves, Chapayev hugs him. He loves this man who has educated him to become "a great leader" at last. Because so many of Rosewitha's mistakes stem from tempestuous political behavior, her solution, as for the Chapayev of the movie, is to develop temperance, ideology and a sound political program.

To begin: instead of pushing off into factory organizing, perhaps the women should start with issues of greatest relevance and immediacy to their own lives. One problem is that Rosewitha and Sylvia never direct their political activity inward, to analyzing their family situations. Quotations from Engels on the obsolescence of the family flash across the screen, yet Sylvia and Rosewitha are loath to challenge this basic institution which truly oppresses them. The women are so consumed by their families that even when they discover outside causes to promote, they fret and worry over their unattended households. Finally, Sylvia drops out, feeling the political work interferes too seriously with her domestic obligations. Unfortunately there is no wise theoretician around to explain that political work begins at home. Rosewitha and Sylvia need to integrate radical feminism into their political theory. As wives and mothers and childbearers, their workplace is primarily in the home and secondarily in the factory.

Perhaps Rosewitha and Sylvia should be agitating toward legalized abortion. As Kluge pointed out in a recent interview,[4] women, like the working class, should demand control over the means of production—or, in this case, the processes of reproduction. But instead of politicizing toward change in the abortion laws—an issue hotly debated in top West German courts around the time Kluge's film was in production—the women give abortions on the sly and seem to accept the establishment's estimation of themselves as "low life." They possess no apparent awareness of the intrinsically subversive nature of their abortions because they have no analysis of their role as women within the workers' revolution. For instance, Rosewitha confronts a former abortion client whose life she once saved. The woman now works for the bosses and is embarrassed by their encounter. Both women fail to recognize the feminist bonds which unite them.

Furthermore, Kluge seems to believe that Rosewitha acts alone too much of the time. Without a support group, allies in the workplace, Rosewitha remains vulnerable to the factory management. Perhaps subconsciously, Rosewitha understands the need for organized, collective action. When the police begin their investigation of her abortion business, she, Franz, and Sylvia avoid prosecution by working together. Franz goes to jail for Rosewitha while she and Sylvia clean out the office, even using a watchdog in their trickster plot to outwit the cops. The three function cooperatively, and through their mutual efforts, avoid catastrophe.

For all her mistakes, Rosewitha is not, after all, a hopeless fool. She is learning by trial and error how to use her anger constructively, and she IS unstoppable. As Kluge comments about her: "Rosewitha, whose path in my opinion is closer to the right one—because it is more effective, more practical—has more opportunities for making mistakes. The only possible way to avoid making mistakes is to do nothing."

In the last shots of the film, Rosewitha sells sausages and passes out propaganda in her little station-on-wheels, strategically located just beyond the factory portals. She is spied upon by the fearful management lackeys, and viewed by the bosses as a dangerous, inimical force. She is a volatile revolutionary whose efforts cannot be dampened even by the firing of her husband or threats against her life.

Most significant: because vending profits are presumably the Bronskis' sole means of support, Rosewitha's responsibilities to her family are soundly united for the first time with her political activities. Mother Courage's wagon is turned toward the revolution.

The most striking and perhaps most radical feature of *Part-Time Work of a Domestic Slave* is its structure, for the Kluge film is a farce which subverts the essential form and theme of Screwball Comedy. Surprisingly, the dramatic roots of this genre can be traced back even beyond the Restoration, beyond Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew*, all the way back to the obscure "Noah" plays of medieval cycles. In the locking of horns of Noah and aggressive, crazy Mrs. Noah, the threat to marriage and the correct world order of male domination of the family, Screwball Comedy was born.

The typical plot of these Noah farces, found in every Mystery Play cycle, is something of this sort: God tells Noah of the torrential rain to come as punishment against earthly sinners and advises Noah to build an ark, taking aboard his wife, three sons and their spouses. But when Noah orders his wife aboard, she refuses to budge at all. In "The Wakefield Noah,"[6] she refuses because she is weaving and can't be bothered to leave home. Besides, she resents men bossing their wives around. In "The Chester Noah,"[7] the wife refuses to board the boat unless her friends, The Gossips, can accompany her, and similarly, in "The York Noah,"[8] Mrs. Noah won't go unless she can bring her relatives aboard to safety; and anyway, she thinks Noah is insane. In the typical middle section, Noah and his wife accuse, scream at and clout each other, with the sons and daughters-in-law joining in the tumult, urging Mrs. Noah to board the ship before the floods came. At last Mrs. Noah gives in and enters the ark. Mr. Noah is victorious in the battle of wills and even physical struggle with his obstinate wife. The Noah family ride to safety, thanking God with prayers, and the

correct familial hierarchy is affirmed at the play's conclusion.[9]

In modern screwball comedies the narrative inevitably unwinds to a reiteration of this man-above-woman world order. In Frank Capra's *It Happened One Night* (1934), heiress Claudette Colbert's father holds her captive aboard his ark, a yacht, so she can't wed the wealthy King Westley of whom he disapproves. She leaps off the boat and in running away meets the penniless, pushy newsman, Clark Gable. The two fight, tease, and torment each other through bus rides, hitch-hiking, and shared motel suites till they meet up again with her father who advises she ditch the King for the pauper reporter. In her last steps toward the marriage altar, she heeds her father's advice, and the proper world order is re-established: Gable dominates Colbert with her father's (God the Father!) complete approval.

In *Woman of the Year* (Stevens, 1942), Katharine Hepburn and Spencer Tracy reverse the traditional family roles and menace the male-dominated world structure. She is the important news reporter, he the simple sports writer. He mopes when she ignores his new hat or forgets a dinner appointment. He wants children; she doesn't. He cooks; she can't. In a rage at her familial insensitivity, Tracy walks out the night she is named Woman of the Year. Wanting to make amends, Hepburn sneaks into his now bachelor flat to cook a surprise breakfast which she completely messes up. But Tracy forgives her. She is the wife, and he is the boss, as he takes control by shoving her male secretary out the kitchen door and down a flight of stairs to end the movie.

In Lewis Milestone's 1931 production of *The Front Page*, Adolph Menjou, as editor, becomes a boss/God figure to Pat O'Brien's Noah/reporter, Hildy, with the female fiancee placed in her structurally correct, secondary position. And even Hawks's seemingly unorthodox *His Girl Friday* ends by reaffirming the Noah form. Rosalind Russell, as Hildy, discards proper marriage to Ralph Bellamy for work on the newspaper and remarriage to the nasty editor, Cary Grant. The essential power pattern reasserts itself: woman reporter gives in to her bullying husband/editor. Hildy climbs aboard the ark when she resumes her position behind the reporter's desk and throws Ralph Bellamy back into the sea.

In *Part-Time Work of a Domestic Slave*, Kluge, whether consciously or unconsciously, sabotages the basic Noah screwball mold, and breaks with its ancient and conventional conclusion of reasserting the male-dominated family order. As self-involved as Mrs. Noah, Rosewitha does do a series of crazy stunts which jeopardize her family and threaten her relationship with Franz. She performs abortions, which land him in jail, and also forces him from unemployment to the factory job he's resisted. And later her agitation in the factory causes Franz to be thrown out of work all over again.

Yet Rosewitha never reforms and never again functions as Franz's humbled, dutiful wife. In the film's last frame, she is outside her home selling sausages, continuing to disrupt the society (epitomized by the factory) in which she exists. The bosses, the Gods of this farce, carry no influence over Rosewitha, even when they use bullets. Neither does Franz—she shrugs when she finds out her husband has been fired. In refusing to enter the ark, Rosewitha remains a threat to the male-dominated, family-oriented, capitalist power structure. Even for her many mistakes, nothing runs smoothly or complacently while Rosewitha is around to cause trouble, not even the ordained world order.

—KARYN KAY

NOTES

1. Alexander Kluge's previous two films are *Yesterday Girl* and *Artists Under the Big Top.* Alexandra Kluge, the director's sister, plays Rosewitha Bronski in *Part-Time Work of a Domestic Slave* and Anita G., the heroind of *Yesterday Girl.*

2. *Mother Courage.* Eric Bentley, ed., New York, 1963.

3. It should be noted that *Chapayev* was used as a tool against Eisenstein and other innovative Soviet film-makers by Stalinist theoreticians. *Chapayev* is a non-montage, psychological drama about the personal relationships between elite heroes—the differences from early Eisenstein are obvious. The film was made by Sergei and Georgi Vasiliev, based on the memoirs of Dimitri Furmonov, the real Chapayev's political commissar. It was released in 1934 in honor of the 15th anniversary of Soviet cinema. It was just subsequently that Eisenstein received his most searing public rebuke

when he was by-passed in the awarding of the Order of Lenin.

4. Dawson, Jan, "The Invisible, Indivisible Man: An Interview with Alexander Kluge," *Film Comment*, vol. 10, no. 6 (November-December, 1974).

5. *Op. cit.*

6. Heilman, Robert B., ed., *An Anthology of English Drama Before Shakespeare* (New York, 1967), pp. 23-43.

7. Franklin, Alexander, *Seven Miracle Plays* (London, 1963), pp. 38-52.

8. Purvis, J.S., *The York Cycle of Mystery Plays* (London, 1971), pp. 45-58.

9. The idea of looking to medieval drama was suggested to me by Gerald Peary.

THE PROMISED LAND

Written and directed by Miguel Littin. Photography: Affonso Beato. Editing: Nelson Rodrigues. Music: Luis Advis and the Inti-Illimani Group. Distribution: Tricontinental Film Center, P.O. Box 4430, Berkeley, Calif. 94704

"Fresco." "Oratorio." "Epic poem." "Folk canto." Where does a reviewer begin when the author of a film has such a clear headstart on appropriating metaphoric phrases to describe his film? The author in this case is the young Chilean director Miguel Littín, named by Allende on the strength of his first feature, *The Jackal of Nahueltoro*, to head and reorganize the state film enterprise, Chile Films. The film is *The Promised Land*, virtually unique among the products of the New Latin American Cinema in that from its inception it was free of the extreme financial limitations and other practical obstacles which plague film-makers under hostile governments. Only the Cuban film-makers have at their disposal the technical advantages and cooperative environment which Littín and his politically committed group of actors and technicians enjoyed during the filming of *The Promised Land*. Metaphors aside, the results of what was perhaps the most ambitious undertaking in the history of Latin American militant cinema are both impressive and challenging.

Set in the early thirties—a time of severe economic crisis, social tension, and political turmoil—the film follows an itinerant band of unemployed workers and landless peasants through the magnificent Chilean countryside. Camping on railroad tracks and hilltops, their numbers constantly swelling, they are more and more brusquely driven from towns they pass through along their way. As they wander, one woman recounts a visitation from the Virgin to another and, lo, the Virgin appears to a young man who was listening in on their conversation. A man in a ragged pin-striped suit talks disconnectedly but in great earnest to another about the Mexican and Russian revolutions, about Sandino in Nicaragua and the mine organizer Recabarren in Chile. It is Pin-Stripe (Marcelo Gaete) who suggests the takeover of some uninhabited government lands, but it is the other man, José Duran (Nelson Villagra), who becomes the leader of the group.

The founding of the Palmilla Settlement, the ground clearing, planting, and first harvest follow in rapid and joyful succession, but the disproportionate cost of the manufactured goods which the settlers must bring in from the provincial capital of Huique alerts them to the limitations of their new-found self-sufficiency. Enter a red airplane, harbinger of a new, socialist government, spewing leaflets. The pilot holds forth on the virtues of socialism. José Duran, following his example, leads his men to Huique to take over the provincial government. The Andes have magically shifted to the interior of the country, and only through the intercession of the Virgin del Carmen are they able to surmount the perils of that mythic geography.*

Once occupying the seat of the provincial government, José vacillates. If he threatens and expels the emissaries of the landholding and shopowning oligarchy, he gives a more sympathet-

* The archaic quality of the language here is a tip-off. The sequence in fact reenacts the legendary Andean crossing of the liberator Bernardo O'Higgins. The first shot of the film, an unfinished church, is the Temple of Maipu, the very one which O'Higgins built to the Virgin in gratitude for a successful crossing. It remained unfinished until the present military junta recently decided to complete it.

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ic audience to their wives. It is in the local brothel that the male class enemies meet again, and there that the insurrectionists learn that the socialist government which they believed to be in power was in fact overthrown a year before. The sergeant who had previously offered his services to José Duran, is now ordered by the most powerful of the oligarchs to rout the interlopers. In defeat, Duran and his men retreat to their valley. Promptly surrounded by the army and its allies of the Catholic hierarchy, they decide to resist to the death. Scenes of slaughter and destruction are intercut with visions of future victory, and the film ends with the words of Che Guevara: "Of those who did not understand well enough, of those who fell without seeing the dawn, . . . of blind sacrifices with no retribution, the revolution was also made."

The ambitious scope of the film and its technical polish testify to the supportive environment in which it was made, but Littín's stream-of-consciousness account of the filming reveals that in fact the endeavor faced other obstacles, and substantial ones:

And that day we spent more than six hours standing in the water in the middle of the fog and it was fucking cold and naturally in June, July and August the bridges washed out and the roads turned into rivers and Marcelo Gaete said it was just like in Garcia Marquez's stories, you saw cows floating down with water up to their necks and drowned calves too and dogs that were rotting little by little and us isolated in that house that the wind was about to blow away and with the mud up above our knees too and when they said "action" the only one who could stay on his horse was Nelson Villagra (a good rider) and everybody else on the ground, horse and all . . .

. . . and stuck there in the muck with all the *campesinos* madder than anything, with the rain and not being able to shoot you think about the critics those snots who are so cocksure afterwards to judge, determine, criticize, to classify as if you were only making movies, no sir, we make history, marble phrases and the smile of the German journalists as they interview us in the famous valley that was washed out on us three times because of the rain and also coordinate the movements of the plane with the walkie-talkie and Jaime the pilot "calling Pablito, calling Pablito" and Pablo Perelman "I read you" and then nothing but noise because you can't hear a thing . . . and who knows how much that famous sequence cost us? Of course as for being nice it's nice and naturally we ran out of money and instead of three months we shot seven or more because this thing never ends and every day we add sequences because the bitch grows by itself and you're responsible and it's just that sometimes you feel yourself turning around and around in that damn house with those damn corridors among all those flags guns uniforms saddles plaster angels priests and assistant priests and Arturo Prat's uniform and the Virgin's robes hanging in the gallery and the tremendous effort to go on living every blessed day and having to turn yourself inside out and change and grow.

. . . and the dough ran out and you had to spend many hours in waiting rooms in the banks and you think about putting an acknowledgment in the movie: WE ARE DEEPLY GRATEFUL TO THE BUREAUCRATS FOR GIVING US THE OPPORTUNITY TO SLEEP IN THEIR OFFICE or else, thanks to all the red tape it was possible to think and re-think this film and we owe the end result to bureaucrat So-and-So . . . (but) the only one really interested in cinema was Don Fermin del Real, mayor of Chepica, who isn't a gentleman for nothing and let us invade the town hall and get it all full of mud and horses until the people almost overthrew him.

. . . and somewhere they explain that the story takes place in the thirties but it doesn't matter because it might as well be now and yeah it's impressive to see them drop like massacred pigeons, or really like doves or partridges and what else could we try to present in the movie but the problem of the takeover of power by the proletariat and if we make movies we do it so that it serves the revolution because if not no one could put up with so much.

(from Miguel Littín, "Notas sobre filmacion, "*Cine cubano* #85/86, translated by Susan Pels and Julianne Burton)

The filming lasted eight months. No film lab in Chile was able to handle the final processing in time, so the film was edited and dubbed in Cuba in order to premiere, by invitation, at the Berlin Festival in the summer of 1973. In the spring of 1974, the Film Department of the Museum of Modern Art and the Lincoln Center Film Society sponsored its first showing in this country as part of their "New Directors/New Films" series. *The Promised Land* was never shown in Chile before the fascist coup of September 13, 1973, and certainly has not been viewed there since. Those involved in the film who remained in Chile have either been imprisoned (the case of Carmen Bueno, the first female lead) or massacred by the military junta (the case of many of the peasants of

THE PROMISED LAND

by Miguel Littín

the province of Colchagua, who provided much of the cast and setting for the film).

Despite the execrable political direction which events in Chile subsequently took, the film cannot be understood if viewed only in the context of the aftermath of the brutal destruction of Chile's popular socialist movement. For though the film is forty years distanced in time, it is clearly informed by the most pressing internal problems facing Chile under the Popular Unity government: the problem of popular education and politicization compounded by communications difficulties and false consciousness, the need to decisively expropriate the entrepreneurial and landowning classes, the role of the army and established religion, genuinely collective versus opportunistic and personalist leadership, the need to arm the masses. One of the major strengths of the film is that these themes are not grafted on to the narrative but emerge organically from it. Littín's film conveys the same prophetic clairvoyance as some of Neruda's penultimate poems. "The only solution is implacable dictatorship," intones a rightwing politician at the religious festival with which the film opens. "Pacification. Equilibrium." Two images in particular emerge from the procession: a banner emblazoned with the legend "Patria y Libertad" ("Fatherland and Liberty" was the name of the most prominent rightwing vigilante organization during the Allende years) and a bishop who admonishes from his litter, "Feed the hungry lest they devour ye." Taking a position in line with the MIR (Movement of the Revolutionary Left), the film offers a critique of *La via chilena*, the Chilean road to socialism with its reluctance to disturb the niceties of the national (read "bourgeois") way of life, especially the Church and the constitution.

On another level—perhaps the least accessible to North American audiences—the film can be viewed as both an appreciation and a critique of popular culture. Narrated as it is by means of folk songs, legendary versions of historical events, religious and secular allegories, *The Promised Land* sets out to reveal the resiliency and resistance as well as the deprivation and mystification which folk culture represents. In the First Manifesto of Popular Unity Film-makers (1970), Littín wrote: "We observe with concern a certain tendency toward picturesqueness at certain levels of Latin American cinema. . . . Let us not exhibit folklore with demagogic pride, with a celebrative attitude. Rather let us exhibit it as a cruel denunciation, as a painful testimony to the level at which the people have been forced to retain their power of artistic creation." Wary of being misinterpreted, he continued, "The future is no doubt with folklore. But by then it will not be necessary to designate it as such since nothing and no one will be able again to paralyze the creative spirit of the people." (*Cine cubano* #66/67, my translation.) Viewed in this light, the film's self-conscious use of mythic motifs and pious symbols of religion and country no longer appears obscure, manipulative, or cynical,

as some viewers have interpreted it. Instead, such techniques are part of an effort to use a traditionally elite consciousness-forming medium (film) to explore and critique those cultural modes which inform the consciousness of the popular classes. The Virgin del Carmen, patron saint of the nation and of the armed forces, appears alternately on the side of the privileged classes and among the members of the dispossessed, as do the flags of the Chilean nation, but in the final sequence she and her court of angels stand firmly behind the oligarchy.

In an interview in a Peruvian film journal, Littín explains his paradoxical use of distancing devices. He seeks participation on an intellectual and critical, not purely emotive, level. The film's moving musical score (by Chilean composer Luis Advis) cannot but involve the spectator emotionally, but other elements and techniques conspire to neutralize this effect. The film vacillates here, or, to put it in a more positive light, operates "dialectically," alternating intense emotional involvement with critical perspective. Planes of historical reality are confused with the mystical and legendary. Several scenes are repeated from varying angles in a manner reminiscent of the Brazilian director Glauber Rocha. (There is perhaps a direct connection here, since Affonso Beato, Rocha's cinematographer on *Antonio das Mortes,* was also the director of photography on this film.) Sequence titles produce another kind of distancing effect, but it is on the audio level that these alienating effects are most concerted. The film is intermittently narrated (in the authentic "country" accent and idiom which is lost on the non-Spanish-speaking viewer) by an old man, survivor of the events which he relates, who appears as a young boy (Chirigua) on the screen. Often the events portrayed are in addition narrated by him in voice-over. Songs are often used, as they were very effectively in the third part of the Cuban film *Lucia,* to spur the action forward. Littín often combines these two audio devices so that what we see on the screen is twice recounted—in prose and in song. There are times (the confrontation between the major and the settlers at the end of the film is a good example) when we can perceive three separate levels of audio information: the voice of the major presenting his ultimatum, the narrator's aged voice recounting what happened, and, over these, a chorus of voices setting the events to music.

The film frequently takes on a self-consciously allegorical dimension, sometimes in contrast to, sometimes fusing with, the realistic strain of the narrative. On their march to the promised valley, the band comes upon a train, symbolic remnant of the world they are leaving behind. Well-dressed passengers throw food at them and hastily close their windows in disgust. Only the riders in an open boxcar (the petite bourgeoisie as opposed to the haute bourgeoisie of the compartments) greet them kindly. The engineer explains, "This is the end of the line. This is as far as we go," and the camera reveals that the tracks in fact give way to open grassland. The great locomotive which represents the bourgeoisie is not just temporarily stalled, but is in fact going nowhere since it has nowhere to go. Only the engineer deserts the dead-ended vehicle to join the pilgrims.

The film's attempt to portray a mass protagonist is not entirely successful. The female characters are bare and often stereotyped sketches. The ingenuousness of the narrator and his pal, though used as a device to further elucidate the meaning of events, is never rounded into a fuller characterization. We are left with a trio of identifiable males: José Duran, Pin-Stripe, and Juan de Dios, the former train engineer. He is irresponsible and opportunistic, a disruptive force in the settlement. He is the one who returns from a foray into the surrounding area with a herd of what can only be stolen cattle. After the harvest, he takes orders for store-bought goods from each settler. Jose attacks him for cultivating individual consumer interests instead of putting the needs of the entire group foremost. At the mountain crossing, and again in Huique, Juan is the one who, impatient and uncomprehending, challenges José to turn back. Pin-Stripe is the ideologue; it was he who planted the first seeds of socialism in José Duran's mind. Though he successfully organizes neighboring *campesinos* and teaches literacy to the settlers, he is also an incurable drunkard who fails to see the implications of the commercialism promoted by Juan de Dios and who confesses that his claims to

an activist past with the great organizer Recabarren are only fantasies. José is the true activist, the "natural" leader. Yet, indecisive at the crucial moment and maintaining an unfounded faith in the support of the army, he too fails. Incapable of initiating the action required by the historical moment, he can only re-act. Unlike the others, however, José returns as a hero in the popular imagination. In the midst of the apocalyptic final battle scenes, José Duran comes galloping back. National patriot Arturo Prat is there too, brandishing his sword. In repeated sequences, they hand their weapons to Chirigua, soldier of the future generation. Death and rebirth, destruction and regeneration: the film mixes mythic motifs with revolutionary imperatives. "This war is starting now and it will never end!" cries José Duran.

It is at this final point that the politics of the film seem fuzziest. One of the last scenes is a smoke-filled tableau in which Meche, bloodied but now crowned, holds the body of José. The obvious implication of this *pietà* is that José is a Christ figure, martyred to the revolution. Yet through the figure of José the film also proposes a critique of indecisive leadership. Despite the political progress he makes during the film, he falters at the crucial moment. It is as a critique of José's fatal hesitation that Chirigua, halting in his new literacy, reads: "History does not forgive those revolutionaries who vacillate just at the moment when it is possible to seize power." Littín wants both to forgive José and to admonish others, on the verge of making the same error, with his example.

The admonition never reached the Chilean public. Since it never fulfilled its intended function as a "political activator" in the arena for which it was intended, by Littín's own standards it cannot be considered a "revolutionary" film. "The revolutionary work proves itself, in reality, after the fact" if "the spectator is capable of being transformed into an agent in the fight for freedom." In this country, *The Promised Land* will be seen as a beautifully rendered cinematic document, an exotic and somewhat mystifying artifact. In Chile its technical mastery (the long, sweeping pans which unify all of Palmilla, the lateral tracking shots of the corrupt and haughty faces of the oligarchy) would have been fused with the contextual urgency which informs all militant Third World cinema viewed in its place of origin. What is essentially a critical curiousity here would there have become a weapon in the struggle.

—JULIANNE BURTON

The Peasants of the Second Fortress is a fascinating political documentary, covering the fight of peasants and farmers, from 1966 to 1971, to stop an international jetport from being built on their expropriated land 30 miles north of Tokyo. On other levels, it reveals the strength and weakness of certain physical and psychological tactics that might be of great benefit to the various shards of The Movement in this country, and focuses on the virtue of revolutionary patience, of planting radical seeds that will flower at a later date. On still another level, it is like watching a classic medieval Japanese siege, almost balletic. The fortress of the title refers not only to the makeshift barricades around their property (there are moving shots of old women chaining themselves to the trees), but also to the underground tunnels and living quarters built by the determined peasants under the land the airport wanted. Though the peasants and their Zengakuren student supporters were wiped out in the 1971 above-ground battle recorded in this film, the "underground," in both physical and symbolic terms, still exists, perhaps to spring up again someday to defeat the forces of greed and rapaciousness.

Director Shinsuke Ogawa and cinematographer Masaki Tamura agreed to shoot footage only of what they themselves could see from where they were with their cameras; there are no zoom shots of action elsewhere during the police/peasant-student battle. As a result, they present the audience with a sense of immediacy and personal involvement—so much so that we feel we "know" some of the peasants involved. More significant, perhaps, is Ogawa's willingness to let the camera roll while the peasants sit around and discuss tactics and world-view. Some of the footage is a waste of time in traditional, fast-paced cinema terms, but the remainder is in the best of the *cinéma vérité* tradition: a beautiful depiction of democracy in action as the peasants devise new strategies based on the police violence. It's about a 2½-hour movie—which, to our Western standards, could use some judicious editing—but stick with it: it's alive with the stuff of history and real human drama. Tricontinental Film Center, 244 W. 27th Street, NYC 10001.

—BERNARD WEINER

an activist past with the great organizer Recabarren are only fantasies. José is the true activist, the "natural" leader. Yet, indecisive at the crucial moment and maintaining an unfounded faith in the support of the army, he too fails. Incapable of initiating the action required by the historical moment, he can only re-act. Unlike the others, however, José returns as a hero in the popular imagination. In the midst of the apocalyptic final battle scenes, José Duran comes galloping back. National patriot Arturo Prat is there too, brandishing his sword. In repeated sequences, they hand their weapons to Chirigua, soldier of the future generation. Death and rebirth, destruction and regeneration: the film mixes mythic motifs with revolutionary imperatives. "This war is starting now and it will never end!" cries José Duran.

It is at this final point that the politics of the film seem fuzziest. One of the last scenes is a smoke-filled tableau in which Meche, bloodied but now crowned, holds the body of José. The obvious implication of this *pietà* is that José is a Christ figure, martyred to the revolution. Yet through the figure of José the film also proposes a critique of indecisive leadership. Despite the political progress he makes during the film, he falters at the crucial moment. It is as a critique of José's fatal hesitation that Chirigua, halting in his new literacy, reads: "History does not forgive those revolutionaries who vacillate just at the moment when it is possible to seize power." Littín wants both to forgive José and to admonish others, on the verge of making the same error, with his example.

The admonition never reached the Chilean public. Since it never fulfilled its intended function as a "political activator" in the arena for which it was intended, by Littín's own standards it cannot be considered a "revolutionary" film. "The revolutionary work proves itself, in reality, after the fact" if "the spectator is capable of being transformed into an agent in the fight for freedom." In this country, *The Promised Land* will be seen as a beautifully rendered cinematic document, an exotic and somewhat mystifying artifact. In Chile its technical mastery (the long, sweeping pans which unify all of Palmilla, the lateral tracking shots of the corrupt and haughty faces of the oligarchy) would have been fused with the contextual urgency which informs all militant Third World cinema viewed in its place of origin. What is essentially a critical curiousity here would there have become a weapon in the struggle.

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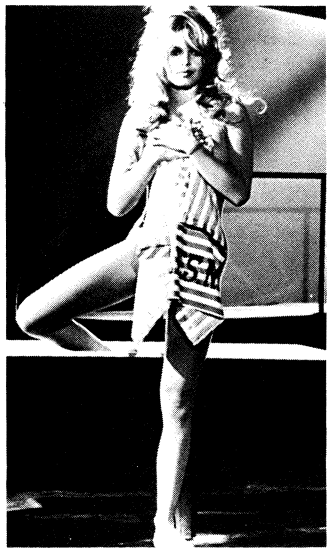

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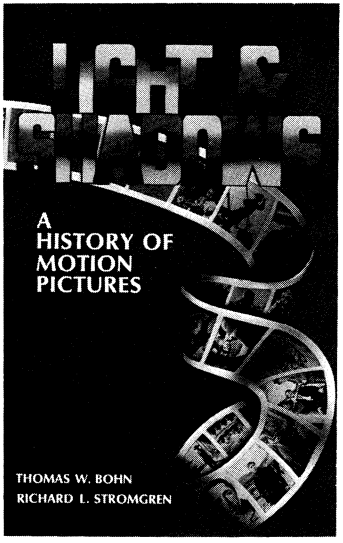

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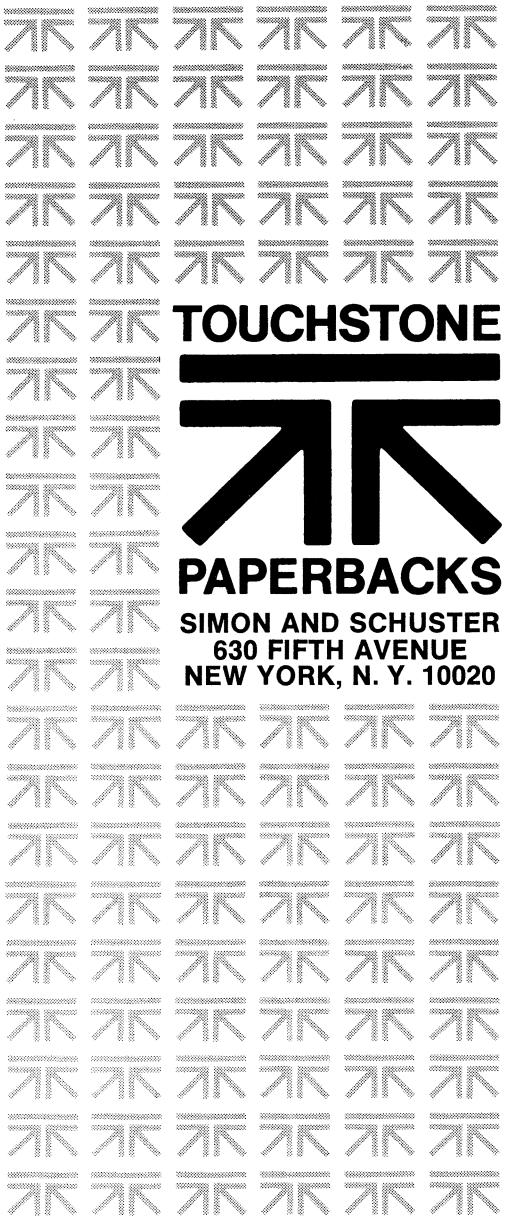

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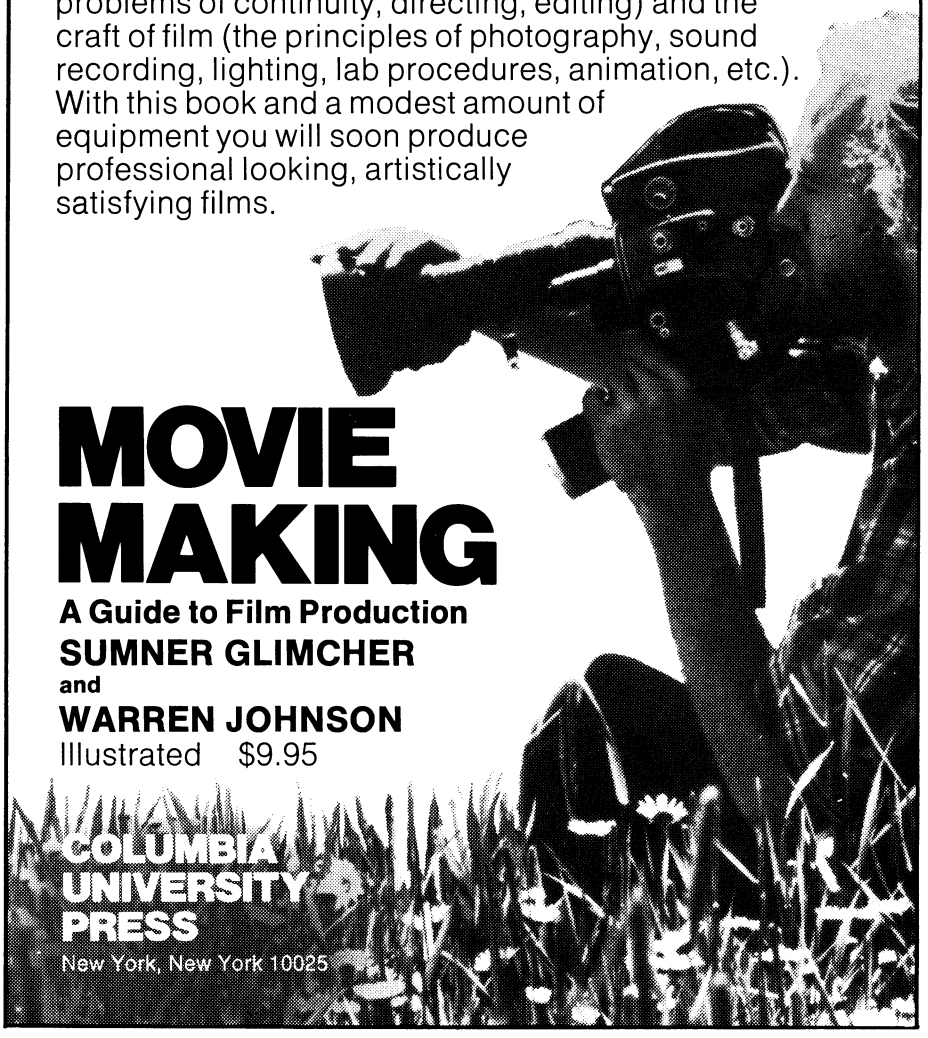

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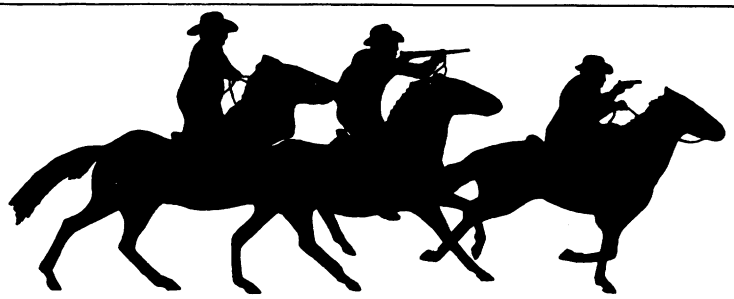

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